**Sweet Tender Abuse**

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# Sweet Tender Abuse

by Hangsaman

Summary

Will's life is a literal nightmare. His job has taken such a big toll on him, that he has turned to alcohol—and spends his days barely functional, in a drunken stupor. One day, he's walking to his workplace—or so he thinks—when he gets brutally hit by a car.

Will is sure that he's doing to die—and he's okay with that.

But then he wakes up in a hospital bed with broken bones. A stranger is present in the room: the man who had supposedly saved his life.

The man introduces himself as Dr. Hannibal Lecter.

Though reluctant at first, Will starts to trust Hannibal. And, ultimately agrees, when Hannibal offers to take care of Will—and see him through his recovery—at his home.

Notes

I will try to update this weekly or bi-weekly, depending on how life goes.
Also...a lot of trigger warnings, I guess. Shit's gonna get demented later on.
Title is from a song by the band Converge.

# Chapter 1

Will had been steadily fuelling himself with alcohol—he couldn't even remember since when.

It had helped him quieten, numb the voices—and the thoughts inside of his head. But the truth was that everyone had a limit with alcohol, and Will was dangerously drunk as he stopped to check where he was. He was sure that he'd been driving just a moment ago—to where? To teach, he concluded. Just as Will was about to look up and check if he was at the Academy, he heard a scream from somewhere, as if from across the street.

And then everything went black.

*

When Will regained consciousness, the first thing that he noticed—aside from the blinding pain—was how sticky-wet he was. Soaked, in what could only be blood. He could feel broken glass embedded on the side of his face. He listened carefully before he opened his eyes: there were voices, both worried and curious. The one thing that Will had a strong distaste for was being the centre of attention, and here he was. He'd made a spectacle out of himself. He'd finally got to be the body on the side of the road, that pedestrians and passers-by couldn't turn away from. Anxiety was rising, impossible though it seemed. *I need a drink,* he thought, ironically.

Finally when he opened his eyes, he heard a woman frantically informing the crowd that an ambulance was on its way. Will tried to turn his head, which only made the crowd notice that he was awake. They cheered—someone even clapped—as if it was a triumph. An alarmingly gentle hand was cradling his head, and stopped him from looking around. The warmth of the touch threw Will off, annoyed as he was.

"Stay still," a voice said, presumably belonging to the man holding Will's head. He had an accent Will couldn't quite place. A foreigner: one who was very sure of himself. Strangely—even as he was on the brink of death—Will felt curiosity spike in his chest. He tried to look up to the man without having to move his head but it seemed impossible; the sun was also directly behind the man. Will tried to lift an arm instead, to do what he didn't know. Maybe to get up, to walk away. But the slight movement only brought on more pain. "You've broken your arm," the voice said. "And your leg."

The wailing sound of the ambulance neared, grew unbearable until Will felt a surge of panic. He opened his mouth as if to reason, but saw from the corner of his eyes, the beige jacket that the man was wearing, dyed now with Will's blood.

"I've ruined your suit," Will croaked. It seemed important that Will apologise. "I'm sorry,"

The man ignored Will's comment, and said instead: "You'll be alright,"

Will's eyes fluttered close. I hope this is it, he thought. And then, smiling to himself:

*Goodbye, cruel world.*

*

Yet, Will woke. He frowned as his eyes followed to his right arm, stiff in a cast; to his right leg, also cast, suspended mid-air on a sling. His whole body ached—he could feel abrasions everywhere on his skin, uncomfortable and bulky with bandages all over. And then his eyes shifted to the foot of his bed. A stranger was sitting in the room with him—dressed immaculately, hair pristine, face composed. He looked back at Will, and mercifully didn't smile. Will wouldn't have known what to do with a smile.

It had been a natural reaction—he convinced himself later—that he had felt fear trickle down his back as the stranger stood up and approached. Fear wasn't a foreign feeling—he experienced it nightly during nightmares, sometimes even during his waking life when looking at crime scenes. But this type of fear, the source of which was a well-dressed man with a mask of a face, was something entirely different.

The man walked over to Will, and lifted a switch to call a nurse. Will wanted to ask what had happened, but his tongue felt like a stone, his throat dry, like he had swallowed sand.

As if reading his mind, the man lifted a jug from the table and poured water into a paper cup. He put a straw into the cup before guiding it to Will's mouth; his movements practiced, and sure. Will drank: the water was sinfully lukewarm but still it felt heavenly. He drank too much and choked mid-gulp. When was the last time that he had really hydrated himself with something other than alcohol?

The man dabbed a paper towel to Will's mouth. Will didn't know how to react to such kindness, so he kept his eyes low and waited for the man to explain who he was.

He looked down at his wreck of a body, suddenly feeling more panicked as he realised that his neck was bare. What had they done with his scarf, he wondered. It was probably unsalvageable now. Will looked up for a second and found that the man was doing exactly what Will had thought that he was doing. Staring at the rope burn on his neck, which had resulted from last week's suicide attempt.

Whatever accident that had landed Will in this hospital bed, was going to be written off as another attempt.

"Were you trying to end your life when you stepped into traffic?" the man asked.

Will looked back in shock. "I wasn't," he replied, but realised that his answer was futile. No one was going to believe him, and he was going to be stuck having to endure 'therapy' and whatnot. He felt sick, thinking about eager doctors trying to psychoanalyse his brain.

"I see," the man replied.

A nurse walked in. Stomped, to be exact. Chest pushed out, confident in her work. Annoyingly outspoken, Will could tell. Just the kind of person Will was not ready to deal with.

“Mr. Graham,” she cooed, then stopped. “And Dr. Lecter,” she smiled, obviously smitten.

*Doctor?* Will thought.

“Mr. Graham! I’m nurse Holly and this is the man who saved your life,” she said. “What do you say?”

She waited expectantly while the man watched in amusement. Was Will expected to say thanks? He looked back at the nurse, glared until it was too uncomfortable for her.

“Well,” she coughed. “I’m gonna have to give you a run-down. But first, we couldn't find any family to contact, so I'll just have to ask: do you have any family we can contact?”

Will shook his head. He had no one. He didn’t even know if his father was still alive.

“No one?” the nurse asked, unable to conceal the look of pity in her eyes. And then she sighed. “You’re lucky you have Dr. Lecter then.”

Will frowned and looked up at this Dr. Lecter, who looked back and smiled.

*

Whoever this Dr. Lecter was, he remained at Will’s side while the nurse explained what had happened to him. Will listened—tried to, with all the pain-killers they were pumping into his body hazing his mind. To be perfectly honest, he couldn’t bring himself to care much. Will couldn’t even muster the energy to feel something towards that man who had supposedly hit him with his car.

He tried also—while listening to the nurse—to observe Dr. Lecter sitting patiently by his side; the way he reacted to the words, the way he held his hands. Will couldn’t decide what to feel. A part of him wanted to push him away, to *run.* But he wouldn’t be able to do that for months now. Another part of him was not terribly displeased to see the man.

The nurse left when Dr. Lecter alerted her that Will needed to rest and was already falling sleep. Will fluttered his eyes, trying to keep awake: he *had* to ask. He had to know. He tried speaking, already feeling that it was too late—the man was turning his back and walking away. What if this was the last time Will would see Dr. Lecter? Then Will would be left with his questions unanswered. It was more of a flight or fight response when he finally gathered the words: “Who are you?”

The man paused in his tracks, and then looked back at Will, nothing in his face betraying any emotion. “No one,” he replied, simply.

Will frowned in confusion, and let it be shown. There was an urgency in his voice when he spoke again: “What do you want from me?”

This time, the man smiled. Or, his lips twitched in a semblance of a smile. “Only your life,” he replied. “Your body,”

Will looked back uneasily, thinking he had hallucinated the answer. He watched as Dr. Lecter walked closer, lifted a hand and neared it to hover over Will's jaw, as if to cup it in an expression of consolation. Will felt a panic rise up in him—felt suddenly awake—recoiling at being touched by this absolute stranger. But the touch didn't come. "Rest now," he said, and drew the blanket tighter around Will. "I will see you again,"

Before Will knew what was happening, the man had walked out. The cries for explanation that he had on the tip of his tongue vanished, as if they had been stuck in his throat. After a moment, Will spoke into the air: "When?"

*

The person who had hit him had decided not to press charges. Will wondered if the FBI had somehow bribed the person, seeing as Will had been allowed to work non-stop when he had been obviously not physically and mentally well.

The hospital was going to keep Will for a week, at most. He had been lucky, they said. No brain injury. It all felt surreal to be hearing this; as if it was a harsh joke that someone had played on him.

And then he could employ someone to take care of him, they suggested. The first thing that came to mind in regards to that suggestion was that he had to find something fast to kill himself before it even came to him being discharged. He looked around for tools—anything —to form an idea. It was something to think about, to obsess over.

The nurse, whatever her name was, was getting on his nerves. Will requested someone quieter.

A male nurse presented himself, pale and tall. He had short hair and a tidy appearance, tidy to the point of being blinding. But Will was okay with that. "Matthew," he introduced himself. "You look like you need a cigarette, Mr. Graham,"

That, had actually made Will smile.

*

The second day: night had passed restlessly. Will worried what he was going to do, and could barely stay still. As if for distraction, he thought about Dr. Lecter. Wondered when he was coming back.

"Matthew?" he asked. He watched as Matthew administered him pain-killers, and wondered if he could manipulate Matthew into giving him more than necessary, so he could overdose.

Matthew smiled back rigidly at Will. He seemed like he had a lot on his mind.

"This Dr. Lecter…who is he exactly?"

"Oh," Matthew replied. "He's a psychiatrist, used to be a surgeon. Well-known."

“Does he work here?” Will asked, though he knew that that couldn’t be true. He hadn’t been in doctors clothing, or had an ID pinned on him.

“No,”

“Anything else you know?”

“Hmm…he was in the ambulance with you when you arrived here,” Matthew said. “Only went home to change, and then was pretty much here the whole time, until you woke up.”

“Okay…” Will said. He couldn’t gauge whether this was what normal people did. “Isn’t that a stalker-ish thing to do?”

Matthew smiled, now more genuinely. “I guess most people would say that it’s a sweet thing,”

“What do you think?”

“I’d be creeped—but I guess it depends on the person.”

“Hmm—yeah…”

“Do you like Dr. Lecter? He certainly cares a lot about you.” Matthew said, shifting Will’s blanket closer around his skin.

“I don’t know…”

“Better be careful then, Mr. Graham.”

*

A woman in her fifties entered Will's room the same day. A psychiatrist, surely.

“I’m Dr. de Winter,” she said, taking a seat where, just the day before, Dr. Lecter had sat.

“I guess you want to know if I was actually trying to kill myself,” Will said, coldly. He had no intention of saying anything. “I wasn’t.”

Dr. de Winter raised her pencilled brows. “Yes, I would like to get to that. But first—”

“I want Dr. Lecter,” Will said. He paused, more for himself, at the words he had uttered, than for anything else.

Dr. de Winter looked back baffled. “Dr. Lecter doesn’t work here—”

“I don’t care.” Will said. He just wanted to see Dr. Lecter again so he could ask him what he had meant.

Will composed his face into a mask to indicate that the conversation was over.

Dr. de Winter fell silent, and then nodded. “Very well,”

*

The next day Dr. Lecter returned. He wasn't 'The man' in Will's mind any longer. He was Dr. Lecter. Will wasn't sure if Dr. de Winter had reached out to him or he had arrived of his own free will. It didn't matter, he guessed.

Matthew was just helping to cut his food into pieces. Will had wondered if he could choke on hospital food and die. It would be an ugly death, but at this point, he would take anything.

"Nurse Brown," Dr. Lecter said, as he entered after a polite knock. "Good afternoon."

Matthew nodded, and then set the plastic utensils down. He smiled at Will. "If you need anything, just press the button," he said, and then exited.

Will felt the hairs on the back of his neck rise as Dr. Lecter approached. "Good afternoon." he said, and then: "May I call you Will?"

Will considered a moment. There wasn't any reason for Will not to allow it. Besides, Dr. Lecter had saved his life. Most people would be thankful. But Will wasn't most people. Yet, he nodded.

"You may call me Hannibal, then."

Will watched as *Hannibal* cleared away the food before him, and then took out various containers from a bag and a thermos.

"I'm careful about what I put into my body," Hannibal said. "So I end up making most meals myself." He served Will a bowl of soup, which obviously smelled rich, compared to what he had been eating. "Though this I made especially for you. For your recovery."

"Chicken soup?"

Hannibal smiled. "Yes—with wolf berries, red dates, star anise. Ginger and shiitake mushrooms."

Will raised an eyebrow. What the actual *fuck?*

But he couldn't just *not* eat the food that had been prepared *especially* for him.

Will lifted his only usable hand: the one which was not his dominant hand. It visibly shook as he gathered a piece of chicken and transferred it to his mouth. He closed his eyes for a second too long as he felt the soup soothe his insides.

"It's very good," Will said, and took a piece of date. The ingredients had been chopped into bite sizes, a detail that invoked a feeling of gratitude, but also a certain uneasiness. Did normal people act this way? Make food for strangers?

Will's hand still shook as he sipped on the soup, spilling some down his front. He was thankful that Hannibal didn't offer to feed him. That would only make him feel pathetic. But

then he realised something else: Hannibal enjoyed watching him suffer like this. Humiliated like this.

He pushed the thought aside for now—he had to give Hannibal more credit than that. And maybe Will was reading him wrong.

He tried to conjure up the things that he had been planning to ask Hannibal, but it was proving futile. He lifted the drink that Hannibal had set for him instead.

“Barley tea,” Hannibal said. “Good for hydration,”

Will swallowed and then wondered if it could be poisoned. Probably not, since apparently Hannibal had specifically said that he wanted his life.

“Uh—thanks for this,” Will managed.

Hannibal smiled good-naturedly. “My pleasure,”

A moment passed in which Will gulped down more soup, trying to summon the words to the question that he was burning to ask:

“Why are you doing this?” Will asked, at last.

Hannibal tilted his head, slightly. “I wish to see you make a good recovery,”

Will fidgeted with the paper cup, bending it with his nail. “But why?”

Hannibal considered a moment, watching Will. He lifted a hand and calmly took the cup away from Will.

How dare he? Will thought. Yet, he didn’t do anything about it.

“Will you tell me about that?” Hannibal asked, looking at the scar on Will’s neck.

“I…it got too much.” he replied.

“What got too much?”

Will shrugged. “Work, I guess.” That made it sound a lot like Will was a cry-baby. He considered what else to say when he heard a group of footsteps down the hall. He knew those footsteps.

“What’s the matter?” Hannibal asked. There was genuine worry in his eyes.

In the end Will didn’t know what made him say it. Perhaps it was just the last resort, that he was cornered into a situation where he was forced to have only Hannibal to provide him help. “Don’t let them in, please,” he pleaded. “I don’t want to see them,”

Hannibal stood swiftly, as if to shut the door, but it was too late.

Jack, Alana and Beverly were peering into the room, faces visibly shocked.

“Oh, Will—” Alana gasped, and then Jack stepped into the room, frowning.

“Dr. Lecter,” he said, looking back and forth between Will and Hannibal. “I didn’t know you two knew each other.”

Hannibal looked back at Will. The picture was frightening, as well as fascinating. Saviour, warding off those who weren’t welcome here.

“Jack, it’s not a good time.” Hannibal said, his voice soft yet professional.

How did Hannibal know Jack?

“Will—” Alana said, trying to sneak into the room. But Hannibal laid a hand on her arm. It had an astonishing effect on her: she withdrew, and retraced her footsteps.

Only Beverly was looking at Will, silently, as if sensing danger.

Hannibal managed to subdue them. He didn’t leave the room because Will wasn’t supposed to be left alone. He hovered with his back to Will in the doorway, speaking in hushed tones. Explaining the situation.

After a surprisingly short time, Hannibal turned around and shut the door behind him.

Now Will was really trapped. He felt his body shrink for no reason as Hannibal approached. Hannibal sat down: his chair was closer now than it had seemed before. Will looked back at Hannibal, not knowing what his next move would be. He watched as Hannibal lifted a hand and ran it down the side of Will’s face, brushing away at his curls. And then, suddenly, something shocking happened: Will felt a sob make its way out of his throat, and with it, tears that had been left unshed for too long. He cried as Hannibal looked on, his hand plastered to the side of Will’s face, his thumb caressing. “I won’t let them near you,” Hannibal said, and somehow it make Will cry even more.

“Thank you,” Will managed, between sobs.

*

Day four: it was easier to bring up some questions that Will had forgotten to ask. Hannibal arrived late, after dinner, as if he knew that Will was itching to see him all day, which, Will had found himself reluctantly doing.

When Matthew wasn’t in, another nurse usually sat with Will, and she wordlessly exited when Hannibal arrived. What power did Hannibal have over these people? Will wondered.

“I was afraid I wasn’t going to be able to catch you awake,” Hannibal said, and sat down. “I brought you some things to read,”

There was a pile of scientific journals and magazines—something easy to flip through—because Will could hardly use his right hand to keep books open.

“I would’ve brought you a blank journal but it seems you won’t be able to write for quite a while,” Hannibal said.

“It’s for the best. I don’t like my thoughts,”

An undeniable glint shone Hannibal’s eyes. “And will you tell me why?” he asked.

Will chuckled. He had already revealed too much of himself, and it was proving to be an unpleasant thing. He tried to diverge: “How do you know Jack?”

Hannibal allowed the divergence. “The same way you did once,” he said, looking at Will closely, as if gauging his reaction.

Will raised his brows, obviously taken-aback.

“They’ve hired me as a profiler,” Hannibal said.

So, Will had been replaced. He wondered if Hannibal had nightmares, like Will did; wondered what Hannibal’s coping mechanisms were. It was no secret that Will had turned to drinking excessively. One day he had found himself having whiskey instead of coffee for breakfast—Will had had an epiphany of a sort, then: that he didn’t really want to live anymore.

“And I’ve known Dr. Bloom a long time. She was the one who recommended me to Jack—after your accident,” Hannibal said.

Will felt an uneasy feeling in his stomach. Had it been a coincidence that Hannibal had been the one to save him, and at the same time be hired by his place of work?

He decided to let the matter rest, for now. He wasn’t supposed to care: he was supposed to be thinking of ways to die.

“How’s the work?” Will asked, to keep the silence from growing too loud.

“I could do without it, considering I have my own practice.”

“And considering you’re forcing yourself to take care of me,” Will said.

One corner of Hannibal’s mouth lifted up. It was subtle, but it was there. “I wouldn’t say I’m forcing myself,”

“Then explain to me why you’re here,” Will said, trying to muster up all his energy to make his voice sound authoritative. “Unless Jack has forced you to nurse me or something,”

“Jack has nothing to do with this. But I must say that there seems to be an atmosphere that suggests that they’re expecting you back,” Hannibal replied. “As for why I’m here—” a pause, where Hannibal gazed out the window and inspected the folds of clouds. “I feel protective of you,”

Will frowned. It didn’t really answer any of his questions.

“It wouldn’t do to let such a beautiful mind as yours perish,” Hannibal said.

Will looked back in mild annoyance. “You know about me?”

“Everyone does, especially in the psychiatric circle. Especially when Ms. Lounds publishes articles about you,”

Jesus. She was still at it?

And to think that Hannibal had read the articles about him, labelling him insane. Labelling him to have the demented mind of a killer, when he had caught Eldon Stammets.

“You were very brave—you caught the Minnesota Shrike,” Hannibal tried.

“I’m far from brave as I can ever be.” Will said. “And ‘brave’ isn’t a word that’s attributed to suicide attempters either. I can practically hear people whispering behind my back, referring to me as the guy who sought the easy way out,”

“I’m quite pleased that you didn’t die,” Hannibal said.

Will remained silent, confused.

“Do you see why it got too much? The…looking at crime scenes. Constantly having to place myself in the mind of a killer.” Will asked.

“I can see how your empathy allows you to go to places the average mind can’t,” Hannibal said. “It was bound to take a toll—why didn’t anyone notice?”

“I guess I’m good at hiding.” Will joked.

“Asking for help is often times difficult.” Hannibal said. “Will you let me help you?”

Will thought for a moment. “I don’t think anyone would like getting into my head,”

“It does not matter if I like it or not. The aim is to ease your pain.”

“Hmm,” Will replied. There was the urgent thought that Hannibal wouldn’t like it too much —wouldn’t want to associate with Will anymore—once he was allowed entry into Will’s mind. But what if something completely different were to result? Hannibal had already proved to be quite unconventional in his manners, good manners as they were. What was his psychiatric practice like?

“And you won’t have other psychiatrists from around here dragging you through any dull processes.” Hannibal said.

“Why would I choose you?”

“Because you want to.”

Will frowned. He felt a flutter in his gut. Hannibal knew that Will was curious about how Hannibal would react to his mind, just as Hannibal was curious about Will.

“Will you let me take care of you, Will?”

Will almost jolted, at how personal his name sounded, coming out of Hannibal’s mouth. “What are you suggesting?”

Hannibal laced his fingers together and leaned back, as if pleased. “I suspect you’re thinking of ways to kill yourself, now that things are as bad as they could be.”

Will grimaced. He felt like he had been caught naked.

“You see no future after this. What if I offered to take care of you, looked after you—in my home? Every need you have, provided for?”

It was outrageous, and completely unbelievable. Will chucked, uneasily. “I don’t think I can afford it.”

“There will be no money involved on your part: I will provide for you.” Hannibal said. Then: “Don’t you wish someone was there to tell you what to do—take every decision away from you? Take care of you?”

Will tried to sit up straighter but he only managed to shift his weight. It was true: he had been feeling exactly like that. He wanted someone to shield him from the jagged world, to protect him from everything and everyone. To just stop having to think for himself.

Before he even gave his answer, he already knew that he was going to say yes. But he feigned being confused, because what kind of person would agree to such a thing so quickly? If he said yes so unthinkingly, it would only prove that he was, in fact, insane. Though he wasn’t sure if Hannibal cared if he was insane or not.

“What do you get out of it?” Will asked.

Hannibal smiled. “Your company.”

“Why would you want my company? You barely know me—I’d only be a burden. People think I’m crazy!” Will argued, though he knew it was futile.

“Because I see the best in you,” Hannibal said, matter-of-factly. “The mirrors in your mind reflect the best of yourself, not the worst of someone else's,”

Will had to take a deep breath. He couldn’t pretend that that wasn’t the kindest thing anyone had said to him, ever.

“What if it doesn’t work out?” Will asked.

“Oh, but it will work out,” Hannibal answered. “Don’t you worry, Will.”

# Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Will moves into Hannibal's house, and he's insecure and uncertain about a lot of things.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A camera flash jolted Will as Matthew was wheeling him out of the hospital.

“Will Graham,” Freddie Lounds shouted. “Glad to see you’re still among the living,”

Will rolled his eyes. Matthew walked ahead and tried to push Freddie away. “Not now, ma’am,” he said, alerting security.

“I might just write an article about your release,” she said, over Matthew’s shoulder. “You can get back at the FBI for fucking you up,”

A security guard appeared, but it was too late. “Call me!” Freddie yelled as she ran away.

Matthew came back and helped get Will into Hannibal’s car. “The amount of times I’ve seen her loitering around here…” he was saying.

“She was here before?” Will asked.

“Yeah—I just didn’t tell you because I didn’t want to stress you out.”

Will was mildly shocked. “Thank you…” he replied. “And thank you for...everything.”

Matthew smiled and shrugged. “Just doing my job, Mr. Graham. I wish you well,”

Matthew stepped back and waved bye as Hannibal drove them to Wolf Trap.

*

Despite his fitted suits and whatnot, Hannibal proved to have strength that was more than impressive. He easily lifted Will and his wheelchair atop the few steps of his house and onto the porch. Will hadn’t even thought this far, he realised.

He unlocked the front door with keys that the hospital had handed over to Hannibal, and left it ajar, after which he wheeled Will in.

Will was expecting some sort of a reaction, but strangely, he only felt empty. He didn’t even wish that he had his dogs with him still. They deserved better. Hannibal placed a hand on his

shoulder. “Alright, Will?”

Will nodded. He let Hannibal wheel him into his bedroom, where everything was as it had been left. His fishing gear, on the table, already gathering dust after only a mere week away. The dog cushions piled in a circle on the floor.

“You had many dogs,” Hannibal noted.

“Gave them away before I—” *went fully crazy.* Will almost said.

Hannibal nodded as if he knew how hard this was for him. He rummaged around in Will’s closet and began taking out clothing necessary for Will’s stay at the Lecter house.

*

After the essentials—all the documents that Will needed as a citizen handed over to Hannibal too—had been packed away into Hannibal’s car, Hannibal stood in front of him and inspected him. He stooped down low on one knee and took Will’s hand in both his, rubbing it for warmth. Will let him—he preferred not to think too much about it. “Do you need time alone?” Hannibal asked.

For what? To say farewell to this place? Will shook his head. He had had many happy times here—alone amongst nature and with his dogs, but those times were gone now, as if they didn’t exist anymore. “Take me away,” Will said.

*

As Hannibal lifted him out of his seat, it was hard not to think about how closely they touched. His arm around Hannibal’s neck, Hannibal’s arms under his back and thigh; in bridal style. It was the picture of injured-woman-in-distress as the strong hero saved her from whatever daunting situation she had been in.

“Welcome to my home, Will.” Hannibal said, setting him down and adjusting the blanket closer to him. “Your home too.”

Will looked up at Hannibal, trying to gauge if he had heard right.

“I’ve tried to clear the floor as much as possible for you.” Hannibal continued.

The doors had also been left ajar; anything that could collide with him pushed to the wall. Will almost said: You did this for me? But instead he swallowed hard. “Thank you,” he said. It didn’t seem genuine enough. So he added: “Hannibal.” It was the first time Will had said Hannibal’s name out loud to the man. And Will could tell that it was having an effect on him: instantly, he watched as Hannibal’s face became warmer. More…*human.*

*

It was a big house, and Will was given his own room to stay in, on the ground floor. That way he could, when the time came, wheel himself freely to the bathroom, the kitchen, or to the dining room.

The gravity of the situation really sunk in as Hannibal laid Will down onto his new bed. Until then, Will felt like he was just tagging along, going with the flow. He was exhausted, and slightly hazy with the drugs. He watched absent-mindedly as Hannibal arranged his limbs, covered him with a blanket that didn't look like it had been used a thousand times before. Placed a number of pillows morphed into comfortable shapes with Hannibal's hands, under his body. He finished with giving Will a sip of water, and then asked if anything was uncomfortable. Will shook his head. Then, he felt Hannibal's hand rest at the side of his face. "You did well today, Will." His hand moved to caress at his hairline, over and over again. "Rest, now."

The praise cracked a dam inside of him. Will felt himself ready to shed tears again. He held onto Hannibal's hand, as if to stop the movement. How could he convey to Hannibal, that he wanted more? That this was exactly what he had been needing; that no matter how much he denied it, he was touch-starved? That he had been lonely? He tried to turn his face away.

"What's wrong, Will?" Hannibal asked.

Will shook his head. He grabbed the blanket by its edge and pulled it over his face.

Hannibal didn't try to pull it away. Instead, he stayed and talked: "You're allowed to tell me, Will." Hannibal said. His voice was tender, to the point that it was making Will feel guilty. "You're allowed to ask for the things you want,"

Will scoffed. "But do I deserve it?"

"Perhaps that is for me to decide," Hannibal said. "You simply ask, and I say yes, or no."

How could he ask, as a grown man, that he wanted to be held? "I think I'm okay now," he replied. "Thank you for everything."

There was a long silence from Hannibal that almost made Will panic. What if he had angered Hannibal? Just as he was about to lower the blanket, Hannibal spoke: "Very well. Sleep now. I will be nearby," he said. "I will wake you up when it is time for dinner."

*

Will woke to find Hannibal hovering over him. He instantly recoiled back, in embarrassment. He hadn't given much thought to how Hannibal made him feel like—frankly, it made him feel like what he imagined a teenaged girl would feel like. It might've been better to have thought about it before he had said yes. But there was no time for embarrassment now. Hannibal was going to watch Will go through way worse than this.

"Dinner is ready, Will." Hannibal said. He helped Will up, peeled back the covers.

"I'm afraid your wardrobe is going to be compromised for a few months." Hannibal said. He was holding a bath-robe, white and fluffy—too expensive for Will. But Will wasn't to complain. The sleeves were wide and easy to slide into. For pants, there wasn't going to be anything that could fit, so he was to go without. Hannibal helped tie the sash across Will's front.

Will was ready to be placed into his wheelchair when he saw that it wasn't there. Instead, Hannibal carried him all the way through the hallway, into the dining room. Will felt his cheeks redden as he was placed onto a chair. He was going to have to get used to being carried around like he weighed nothing.

The food in front of him was spectacular. "Were you ever a chef by any chance?" Will asked.

Hannibal smiled as he served Will a cut of mackerel. "No, but I learned," he said.

"That's…impressive," Will said, awkwardly. He watched as Hannibal cut the fish into pieces. Technically, Will could, if he tried, use his own hands. But it would only end in a mess. "Thank you," he said.

"My pleasure," Hannibal said, placing finely chopped vegetables that had been stir-fried onto Will's plate. He poured cold tea for them—no alcohol for Will, because of his medication.

"Eat, Will."

"Thank you," Will smiled and took up his fork, stabbing the piece of fish; Hannibal did the same with his.

"I've arranged for a care-taker when I'm not available," Hannibal said, unprompted. "His name is Randall, and he's very trust-worthy."

Will swallowed. "Do I need one?"

"You do—or at least until you get used to the crutches."

"Okay,"

"Would you like a bath tonight?" Hannibal asked.

"You mean like a scrub?"

"Yes,"

"Uh—yeah," Will replied, almost ready to say that he could do it myself.

"Very well." Hannibal answered, and smiled. "Jack is probably going to start asking the hospital of your whereabouts. How much do you want to tell him?"

Will felt a sinking feeling in his stomach. He wanted nothing to do with Jack, or the FBI for the rest of his life. "I want to write a resignation letter," Will said instead. "Is that a stupid thing to do?"

"You don't owe Jack anything," Hannibal said.

"He—broke me, as Alana put it. He promised her I wouldn't get too close. But he kept pushing me," Will confessed, surprising himself.

“But you felt obligated to keep saying yes?”

“I tried saying no but he was persistent. I guess I let myself be pushed around more than I thought.”

“Do you feel betrayed?” Hannibal asked.

Betrayed. The thought had never come to him. But yes. It was betrayal. He had been betrayed by the people around him all his life. Will gulped as he wondered what was so different about Hannibal that he had said yes. He nodded to Hannibal’s question, realising that somewhere in the future, there was a possibility that Hannibal would betray Will, or the other way around.

“Finish your dinner,” Hannibal said. “And then we can give you a warm scrub.”

*

Will waited at the dining room as Hannibal prepared the bathroom. He let his good arm drape over Hannibal’s neck automatically when the time came. He tried not to think too much when Hannibal undressed him. There was another thing that he was worried about: how was he going to tell Hannibal that he needed to pee?

Instead, Hannibal took away the decision from him. He sat Will down on the toilet seat. “Do you need privacy?” he asked, though Hannibal was already looking at him naked.

Will considered a moment. He was too tired now to be embarrassed; to think, to worry. He shook his head, and did it right in front of Hannibal. It felt good, to be reduced to nothing but what he really was, essentially: an animal who had basic needs.

When he looked up at Hannibal, he was smiling. Hannibal placed a hand on top of Will’s head and patted. It felt good, for some reason Will couldn’t pin down.

Will watched as Hannibal folded back the cuffs of his sleeves and put a plastic cast cover on his arm and leg to keep them from getting wet. He was seated on a stool, on top of a towel. The water that Hannibal had collected in the tub was deliciously warm. Will signed unconsciously as he felt Hannibal run a wet towel across his skin, avoiding the places that still had bandages on them. “Good?” he asked, watching Will’s face closely.

Will nodded eagerly, unable to keep from smiling.

He closed his eyes and leaned into Hannibal’s hands as Hannibal massaged his head with shampoo. He wondered why he had ever felt embarrassed before when it felt so good to give up free will; and to surrender yourself completely to someone else.

*

“This is for you when you need me, or Randall.” Hannibal explained. He placed a device into Will’s hand, which had only one button on it. “If you need me in the middle of the night, do *not* hesitate. Understand, Will?”

Will nodded. He was somehow dreading the moment when Hannibal would leave his side.

Hannibal smiled and laced his fingers together. “At the end of the week we should have a discussion, regarding any concerns that you might have.”

Will nodded. “Okay. Thanks. For everything.”

“Of course, that doesn’t mean that you should wait for the week to end. You can tell me anytime you want.” Hannibal said. “Tomorrow Randall will change some of your bandages, and I will return from work at night. We will have dinner together and then we can work on your resignation letter.”

“Okay,” Will replied. He hesitated but he had a question: “Are you going to leave me alone? Like…aren’t you worried I might try to…kill myself when you’re not here?”

“A fair question,” Hannibal said. He shifted closer to Will and peered into his face. “I believe you don’t really want to die now, do you, Will?”

Will remained silent. It was true that he didn’t feel too urgent about it.

“Do you want me nearby?” Hannibal asked, smiling in a way that looked as if he was joking.

Will considered it: part of his reluctance to have Hannibal sleep by him was because of how attached he was already getting to Hannibal. He hadn’t anticipated how intensely dreadful the feeling was when Hannibal wasn’t in his sight. He could’ve predicted this, because Hannibal clearly symbolised safety and protection.

He played with his hair so it could cover his face. Hannibal caught his hand and pulled it away.

“You need only ask,” Hannibal said.

Will tried a version of the truth: “I have nightmares, they would only disturb you,”

“I see,” Hannibal said. “I would like to talk about these nightmares with you,”

Will chuckled. “Like therapy?”

“It can be if you want it to be,”

“Therapy doesn’t really work on me.”

“Shall we put it to the test?” Hannibal said.

But before he could say anything else, Will spoke: “But would you? If I asked you to stay here?”

“Yes, if it would make you feel better,”

The answer was so simple, and so honest, that it left Will stumped. But then he realised that he had exposed his need for Hannibal out loud. “I think I’ll only keep you awake,” he finally said, and then yawned.

“I’ll be in the room beside you if you need anything,” Hannibal said, and placed his hand on Will’s shoulder for a second. The touch shouldn’t have affected Will as much as it did. The room darkened as the lamp was turned off. “Good night, Will.” Hannibal said.

“Night, Hannibal.” Will answered.

*

Will prayed—to whom, he didn’t know. He pleaded, to his mind, to not have nightmares. But of course, it was only inevitable. This time he didn’t wake himself, but was woken up by Hannibal. Instinctively his limbs thrashed around him—until they were subdued by Hannibal’s hands. “Will!” he called. “You’ll injure yourself,”

“Wha—” he was sweating, and could barely speak.

“I’m here,” Hannibal said. “You’re safe,”

Finally, Will felt himself settle down. Hannibal was half-way on the bed, trying to hold him down. Will placed his shaky hand on Hannibal’s. “I’m sorry,” he said.

“Don’t be,” Hannibal replied.

Hannibal moved to stand up but Will couldn’t help himself: “Don’t go,”

Hannibal nodded. In the end, Will didn’t even need to ask to be held. Hannibal climbed into the bed—after wiping away the sweat from Will's body—he snuggled close, until his nose was grazing the side of Will’s neck. An arm held Will tight across his belly, Hannibal’s thumb softly caressing. Second by second, Will felt his panic subside.

“Would it help to talk about it?” Hannibal asked.

“I don’t know…I’ve never told anyone about my dreams,” Will replied.

“It’s in your nature to be silent about your pain,” Hannibal said. “Perhaps we should change that.”

Will stayed silent, pondering.

“It doesn’t have to be like therapy. We can simply talk,” Hannibal hitched himself up on his elbow and was gazing into the side of Will’s face.

Will opened his mouth to talk but nothing came out. Since working for Jack, all his dreams had become cryptic crime scenes. He just couldn’t see that talking about them would help. What he hoped would help, though, was time. Eventually they would wean out, the more time he spent not looking at crime scenes.

“Why…what made you decide that you wanted to take care of me?” Will asked, instead. He turned his face to glance at Hannibal, and felt both frightened and excited with how near he was.

“You like to deflect.” Hannibal stated.

“So do you,” Will retorted.

“Then perhaps we’re more similar than one would think,”

Will waited. “You haven’t answered my question,”

“And you haven’t told me about your nightmare.” Hannibal said, smirking.

“I don’t think anyone has taken an interest in me the way you do,” Will said. “Is this a sort of an experiment? To test how the both of us will turn out in the end?”

Hannibal shifted his arm over to Will’s chest, closer to his heart. Suddenly, Will felt it important that he not show how much this was affecting him. He tried to keep his heart-rate normal.

Will: “I’m not gonna be angry if you admitted that this is an experiment. You’re a psychiatrist —you naturally want to help people.”

“What if I told you that I was simply…drawn to you? And that I cannot possibly explain why?”

It was an admission that Will wasn’t sure he had heard correctly. He felt a little guarded as he wondered if Hannibal wanted to rummage around in his head because he was merely curious.

“The fact that I didn’t question you enough and agreed to this probably says a lot about me too,” Will said. “Even though my mind’s a bit hazy and I can hardly make decisions.”

“You weren’t in the right mind to be making such decisions,” Hannibal said. “Sometimes even adults need help,”

“I feel like a child,” Will said.

“Helpless?”

“Don’t know what to do—where to go, that sort of thing.”

“What was your childhood like?”

Will shrugged.“Everyone’s childhood is bad.”

“Would you like to talk about it?”

Will considered for a moment, words failing him. What would he say?

“Tell me what you dreamed of, then.”

“I—” He wanted to talk, wanted to tell Hannibal. But not talking had become too much of a norm. He struggled to form words. All the while, Hannibal waited patiently, and didn’t prod.

Eventually Hannibal drew Will closer—a gesture that surprised Will—as if to say, he didn’t need to say anything.

Will found that Hannibal’s hold was comforting. He felt like crying.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry if this was boring, I'm trying to do some world-building before anything big happens. Thanks for reading!

# Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Will is starting to feel more at home with Hannibal, but has trouble expressing himself.

Though Will didn't know Hannibal well enough—really, he didn't *really* know Hannibal—being confronted with another stranger put it into perspective how much at ease Hannibal had come to make him feel.

Will didn't know what Randall Tier was like, when he was himself, but when he was with Will, he proved to be concise and sharp with his tasks. He didn't ask any private questions. He kept to himself and avoided prolonged eye-contact, as if he had been instructed to keep Will from being uncomfortable as much as possible. It was obvious what was happening: Hannibal had observed Will, had taken notes, and passed them onto Randall. It should've frightened Will, or at least made him feel eerie, but it only seemed to leave him in awe of Hannibal. In awe and disbelief that someone knew and observed Will so perfectly as Hannibal did.

"Would you like me to trim your beard, Mr. Graham?" Randall asked, after their lunch.

Will had gotten a little too comfortable with the length. Perhaps it was for the good. Perhaps looking neat was the least that he could do for Hannibal. "Yes, thank you."

Randall smiled. "And then after we can take a stroll though the neighbourhood. Get some fresh air for you,"

*

Dinner was reserved with Hannibal.

"How is Randall?" Hannibal asked.

"He's…perfect. Thank you." Will said. What else could he say?

"Up to your standards?"

Will couldn't tell if that was meant to be a joke. "Way above my standards."

"I'm glad." Hannibal smiled. "Tell me, Will, when did the nightmares begin?"

Will stared at Hannibal in silence. The change of subject was so abrupt that it caught him off-guard. Suddenly, he had the urge to scratch at the scar on his wrist. "Well," he began. "I used

to teach at the academy and—Jack just showed up one day and plucked me out—wanted to use my imagination, he said."

Hannibal listened, ever patient.

"It was…instant. The first time I came home after a crime scene, I had a dream about the girl who was killed." Will said. "It kept getting worse. I just…felt like I was going crazy. And then Freddie Lounds wrote that article about me being insane because I could think like a killer,"

"It seems like Jack has really turned your life upside down,"

"I should've said no,"

"It's not your fault, Will." Hannibal offered. "People were dying, and you couldn't let that happen. You did what was right—only it almost cost you your life."

Will nodded, somewhat unsurely.

"Yet—some lives are worth more than others. I would certainly choose your life over another's,"

"You would?"

"In a heartbeat."

"But why?"

"Because I'm your friend."

The answer was so simple. Yet, it struck something inside Will's of heart. He looked at Hannibal and wondered how he had come to deserve such kindness. A little nervously, he smiled and reached out his uninjured hand, and placed it onto Hannibal's hand in gratitude. Hannibal offered a smile, to mask the surprise at such a gesture from Will.

Will retrieved his hand back as soon as it began feeling uncomfortable—as soon as the touch felt a little too intimate.

"Tell me about your first nightmare." Hannibal asked, changing the subject.

Will smiled, shaking his head. "We're not doing this." He said, although outright saying no to Hannibal felt awful. More than awful.

"Why?" Hannibal asked, his eyes looking the way they did so—tender, as if to coax out answers out of Will.

Will paused, trying to think of an answer. "Don't wanna scare you away," he said, finally; truthfully.

A moment passed. "Don't friends tell each other these things?" Hannibal prompted.

“Like…your deepest darkest fears and stuff?” Will said, almost smirking. He knew he was pulling Hannibal away from the subject of his nightmares, but then realised that now Hannibal was going to ask about his deepest, darkest fears.

“I used to be scared that I would die alone and friendless.” Will said. “But then that concern was replaced by another—a more urgent one. That I would never end up having the courage to kill myself.”

“Except you did, but failed.” Hannibal said. “And what about now?”

“Now…I don’t know.” Will replied. In truth, he knew: he was scared that Hannibal would eventually grow bored of him, and inevitably, leave him.

*

Hannibal had already typed out a resignation letter, so perfect that not much editing was needed.

“Will Jack keep consulting with you for cases?” Will asked. Really, what he meant was, was Hannibal going to continue working with Jack.

Hannibal pursed his lips. “I was thinking of resigning after we wrap up our current case,”

Will was surprised. He had to stop bracing himself for expecting the worse out of Hannibal. Because up until now, Hannibal had proved *not* to fail him, in everything.

“It feels too much like I would be condoning Jack for what he did to you if I kept working with him.”

Will nodded, thankful. It was the first time in his life that he accepted that phrasing—that Jack had did something to him, and that it was okay to lay blame.

“We don’t need him in our lives.” Hannibal said.

*

“Dr. Lecter used to treat me once,” Randall said one day, unprompted. The sharing of this personal history was so sudden that for a second Will felt stunned with shock. He didn’t want to be insensitive, so he didn’t ask him what he had been treated for.

“He helped me a lot,” Randall continued.

“How long ago?” Will asked.

“I was a teenager,”

Will watched as something that resembled a smile appeared on Randall’s face. Perhaps Randall saw himself in Will, and that was what had encouraged him to share, to convey that the road to recovery was possible. Whatever Will was mentally struggling with wasn’t forever going to cripple him. He only had to let Hannibal treat him, let him fiddle around in

his head. So what was stopping him? And why was the thought that Hannibal might find him ugly so hard to accept?

Because really—Hannibal was his last hope. He was all Will had. If he fucked this up, the only alternative would be to kill himself.

*

“Alana asked to come see you,” Hannibal said during dinner. He watched Will closely for how he was going to react.

Will stopped chewing and set his spoon down. Tonight, Hannibal had presented him a heavenly serving of risotto. It felt like comfort food, except the ingredients were far too expensive for it to be comfort food.

“I’m happy with never seeing anyone for the rest of my life,” Will said. He used to dream about an abandoned place in the middle of nowhere, much like Wolf Trap, where he could spend his days like a hermit.

“I see.” Hannibal answered.

“Except you, of course.” Will added, undeniably feeling a flush in his cheeks.

“I’m honoured,” Hannibal replied.

*

“You said you didn’t want to scare me away—what makes you think I’d be scared?” Hannibal asked, later.

Of course, Hannibal was a psychiatrist. He probably had heard it all. Nothing was truly going to shock him. But it was more the thought of Hannibal being secretly repulsed by Will that scared him. That made him want to keep his thoughts and dreams as close to him as possible.

“You diagnose people on a daily basis. If I start talking, how am I going to be able to stop you from labelling me insane, like Freddie and the rest of the world did?”

“Trust me, Will. I am only trying to help you. I don’t want to see you suffering as you do with your nightmares.” Hannibal said. “And I don’t care much for labels—a word cannot describe or contain the entirely of a person. He is more than that.”

Will paused, thinking. “You care for me that much?”

“Yes, I do.”

Why was that such an easy thing to admit for Hannibal? Will felt himself quiver with the thought.

“Skin and bones often show surprising abilities to heal. But the mind—” Hannibal said, as he watched Will inspecting his own injuries. “—can only heal if you allow it to.”

“How can you heal a disordered mind?”

“Perhaps with you, it is more about healing your attitude towards your mind. Talking about it may help, Will. It is not a sign of weakness to lean on someone.”

Will nodded. But then, hadn’t he already started leaning on Hannibal when he had agreed to Hannibal’s proposal? He only needed a little more time...he reasoned.

There was a hunger in Hannibal’s eyes like never before. A hungry curiosity. “The people who you empathised with—you can’t help but empathise with them, and that scares you,” Hannibal stated.

Will shrugged, uncomfortable with being seen so clearly. “Empathising with them made me feel like I was guilty of their crimes,” Will said, and already felt like he had said too much. He was agitated—he hadn’t been able to get too much sleep the night before with the nightmares plaguing his sleep.

“And how did that make you feel?”

Will bit his lip. “Like I wasn’t sure who I was anymore.” he replied. “Still not sure if I’m the same,”

Hannibal’s face was keen, but for what, Will couldn’t tell.

“Sometimes I feel like some of the killers never left me. It's as if there's a trace of them left in my mind. I find myself thinking like them...thinking of wanting to do the things that they did to their victims.” It was only when the words had left his mouth did he realise what he’d just said. When he looked back at Hannibal, he was shocked to find that Hannibal’s face wasn’t twisted in disgust.

“There’s a difference between thinking and doing,” he stated.

Will wasn’t sure how to answer.

“I don’t think you are going to hurt me,” Hannibal said, as if it were a fact.

But the fact was that Will wasn’t entirely sure.

“Everyone thinks about some sort of an act of violence. Or even killing, for that matter.” Hannibal said. “People don’t talk about these things polite society forbids it. Yet—death happens everyday, and we simply choose to ignore it.”

“Talking about death—and wanting to kill someone…are an entirely different matter, Hannibal.”

Hannibal leaned forward. “Have you ever wanted to kill, Will?”

Will swallowed, shocked that he didn’t feel the need to immediately say no. “Yes,” he whispered.

Hannibal nodded, a smile on his lips. “I thank you for your honesty.”

Will smiled uneasily. He wondered if Hannibal had ever wanted to kill, but kept quiet instead. He wasn’t sure he wanted to know the answer, yet.

“Doesn’t that alarm you?” Will asked.

“At times it is impossible for one to control his thoughts.” Hannibal said. “Thinking doesn’t make one a criminal.”

Then why did Will feel so guilty, as if he had killed all those blue-eyes girls who looked just like Abigail Hobbs?

*

Hannibal was making a place for himself inside of Will’s mind: always there, burrowed alongside his thoughts. It was supposed to be uncomfortable to find that someone else could have a positive effect on you. To find that their presence soothed you, and kept you from going into depressive episodes.

As Hannibal tucked him into bed, Will tried to keep Hannibal by him just a little longer. Maybe it was because Hannibal hadn’t recoiled in horror after what Will had told him about his thoughts. That Will’s thoughts were—no matter how outrageous they seemed—normal.

He could see himself getting addicted to confiding in Hannibal, until everything was confessed out of him, and he would be left a blank, clean slate. But he had to be cautious. The things that he had told Hannibal up until now had been received well—but what else could Hannibal tolerate?

“Would you read to me?” Will asked. He felt selfish, for imposing so much on Hannibal. But really, it was Hannibal’s fault: it as if Will’s brain had re-wired itself to crave attention from Hannibal.

“Of course, what would you like?” Hannibal asked.

Will inspected the pile on the table beside his bed. There had already been a pile when he had arrived: Lord Jim, The Book of Disquiet, The Lottery and other stories, Down and Out in Paris and London…The complete stories of Edgar Allan Poe.

Moby-Dick.

Will had smiled at that.

“I’ve never read Ovid,” he said. “Too intimidating…maybe you can help me,”

Hannibal smiled, and it was the most genuine one that Will had ever seen. “Metamorphoses,” Hannibal replied, sliding out the copy from the pile. “Of course,”

Will settled his head down and stared in wonder as Hannibal read. He was well aware that Hannibal was letting him stare at his face like this, and he liked that he had what no one else

could possibly have. Hannibal reading to him—so close…so personal. Hannibal was… beautiful, like a moving sculpture—Will thought, an admission that chipped at his so-called masculinity. He payed attention to the way the words that flew out of Hannibal's lips, the way his hair fell in an elegant swoop over his forehead. Will payed full attention—he thought he did, but somewhere along the way he lost himself in the landscape of Hannibal's face, and the floating words of the poem.

That night he dreamed—he couldn't exactly say that it was a nightmare or a dream. He was floating at first, and then he felt the undeniable feeling of falling from a great height. But just as he was about to hit the ground, he felt strong arms encasing him; saving him. When he woke up with a jolt, he was surprised to find Hannibal beside him—arms around him.

*

It was unquestionable that Hannibal was proving to mean a lot to Will—but something other than mere friendship—something foreign was blooming inside of Will's heart. He shoved the feeling away, because it simply wasn't acceptable. When the urge to touch himself hit him, he instead tried to focus on what object he could find to harm himself with. It wasn't an easy task—Randall would notice; so would Hannibal. So he made do with pinching at places that weren't immediately noticeable—palms, the back of the neck where he could hide it with his overgrown hair.

He wondered if his judgement of Hannibal was becoming cloudy because he was undeniably becoming attracted to Hannibal. Because, if one thought about it, the situation was bizarre: what kind of grown man offered to take care of an injured and broken one?

And was he going to let Hannibal get away with leaving things unexplained, just because Will liked him?

That night marked a week since he had moved in with Hannibal. After dinner, Hannibal asked if there was anything that he could improve on.

"Umm…no," Will replied. "Meaning everything is beyond improvement."

Hannibal smiled playfully. "Are you sure?"

"Yes—" Will said. "Everything's perfect. You're perfect—"

Hannibal's smile turned softer. He looked back at Will in wonder, as if he hadn't been expecting those words at all.

Will blushed, and looked down at his hands. "Sorry, I…" he fumbled. "If that's a little creepy…"

"Not at all," Hannibal said.

Will only wished Hannibal hadn't been able to spot how true the words were; how smitten Will was becoming. It was getting increasingly difficult to be around Hannibal—yet, when Hannibal wasn't there, he felt alarmingly lonely. As if he was missing a limb.

“Tell me, Will,” Hannibal said. “How did it feel, killing Garett Jacob Hobbs?”

Of course the question startled Will. He stared down at his food tight-lipped. If he shared what he felt about Hobbs, then all would come loose and Hannibal would figure him out to be some kind of a psychopath.

“If I tell you…”

“You avoid the question as if you are going to admit that you liked killing Hobbs,” Hannibal said, nonchalantly—as if to force Will into admitting the truth.

Will froze for a moment. He didn’t have enough acting skills to pretend that the comment wasn’t making his heart beat faster.

Hannibal smiled. “Does it feel that bad?”

Will took a sip of water, swallowing any answer that he was going to accidentally blurt out.

“Does it feel bad because you killed a man, or does it feel bad because you liked killing him?”

This was getting way out of hand.

“You can tell me, Will.” Hannibal said. “What are you afraid that I might do?”

“It’s not what you might do,” answered Will. “It’s what you’ll think of me,”

“Do you think I’ll think of you as less if I found out that you liked killing Hobbs?”

Will had to think about that. “Would you?”

Hannibal shook his head. “No,”

*Why?* Was his first reaction, but Will confessed instead: “I liked killing Hobbs.”

Will looked up at Hannibal to find that his smile hadn’t faded.

“Liked it because you were able to save his daughter?” Hannibal asked, playing around.

Will shook his head. “Liked it because of how thrilling it was.”

Hannibal reached out and placed his hand on Will’s. “Thank you for being honest with me,”

“You’re not alarmed?”

“Should I be alarmed?” What he meant was, are you going to try to kill me?

“No,” Will replied. “Just…usually people’s reactions are a little more…visceral.”

“I wouldn’t berate you for being who you are, Will.” Hannibal said.

“I’ve always had a…violent streak in me, as my father used to say.” Will half-joked.

“Without violence we would never know true peace.” Hannibal said. “Everything has its place in the universe. Does is not?”

Will nodded, speechless. Never had he thought that someone other than a serial killer could understand him. Hannibal—accomplished, wise and kind—how had Will become so lucky as to cross paths with him? It was too good to be true.

*

Now that the possibility of having someone to understand him had presented itself, Will found himself trying to escape from Hannibal’s grasp. It wasn’t that he was suspicious of how well Hannibal had taken his confessions—that wasn’t supposed to be so surprising, considering that he was a psychiatrist. It was more that he was feeling weak—weak because all his life, Will had convinced himself that he'd never need anyone. Whatever was bothering him, he'd always come up with a solution on his own. But Hannibal had proved it to be otherwise.

He didn’t know how to deal with it. All he could think about was that he wanted to sabotage this paradise—make Hannibal hate him for the sick and demented monster that he was.

“Would you like to know what Ms. Katz said today?” Hannibal said casually, as he presented Will with dinner.

Will only raised a brow. He wasn’t particularly interested, but he didn’t have to heart to tell Hannibal that.

Hannibal sat down and regarded Will closely, eyes moving around on Will’s face. “I can feel you…retracting away from me,” he said. “Trying to go within. Stay with me, Will.”

How was it so easy to see? “I’m sorry,” Will said, not knowing what else to say.

But Hannibal was patient, as always. Something like fury ran down Will’s spine. Why was he so composed all the time, and why did he seem to have all the answers? Will wondered what Hannibal looked like when he was alone; when he was truly himself.

“It is not a matter of apology,” Hannibal said.

Will shrugged. “I’ve ruined our meal,” he felt guilty all of a sudden; on the verge tears.

“Something on your mind, Will?” Hannibal asked, tilting his head.

*You.* Will wanted to say. You’re on my mind. “No,” he replied.

Hannibal searched Will’s face. “Ms. Katz said that she missed you,” Hannibal tried.

Despite his rotten mood, Will smiled.

*

“Will you tell me what is wrong?” Hannibal asked, as he helped Will into bed.

Will shook his head. He felt like he was really tempting fate—denying Hannibal access to his mind like some sort of punishment. He wanted to see Hannibal lose himself with anger. He wanted him to suddenly strike him across the face and tell him to stop acting so ungrateful.

But instead, he felt Hannibal observing him; and then caressing his hairline. Will exhaled, trying to keep his composure.

“How about I read to you?” Hannibal offered. “Or would you prefer some quiet?”

Will couldn’t decide. He was walking the line of wanting to push Hannibal away; but also wanting him close. He stayed silent for so long, that Hannibal made the decision for him. Will heard pages being turned, and then Hannibal’s honeyed voice soothingly reciting verses.

Before long Will’s anger morphed into that of remorse. How had he been so cruel as to treat Hannibal like that? Suddenly, as Hannibal gradually lowered his voice, Will wanted to jump out of bed and beg for forgiveness.

Hannibal noiselessly closed the book and observed Will, as if checking to see if he was still awake. “You don’t have to hide your thoughts from me, Will.” Hannibal whispered. “You know I wouldn’t turn away.”

“But why?” Will whispered back, his throat already feeling hoarse as if he had been crying. “Why do you tolerate me? I don’t deserve this,”

“Asking me why would only prove to be futile.” Hannibal replied, his hand returning to caress Will’s hairline.

“I’m a monster,” Will said, now really feeling his tears start to leak.

“Not to me, you’re not.” Hannibal reassured. “What about you makes you a monster?”

“I am all the things they say that I am. I can think like a killer because I am one.”

“What about killing makes you a monster?” Hannibal tried. “You haven’t gone out and committed cold-blooded murder, Will. Just because you can think like a killer, doesn’t make you one.”

Will remained silent, finally starting to listen to Hannibal’s words.

“Your ability to empathise has saved a lot of lives. Doesn’t that make you a good person?”

Did being good or bad matter at all? Will wondered. What was it that scared him so much about being like all those killers—all those monsters?

“Don’t feel like a good person at all.”

“What does a good person look like, anyway?” Hannibal tried, a smile playing at his lips. “In fact, we’re all monsters. We’re all inherently bad, deep down. But you—you’re special.”

“Special?”

“Your mind has the ability to connect to anyone’s. So many of us go through life looking for genuine connections. You’re gifted, and you must treat it like a gift.”

Will considered. An absurd thought came to his mind. “Are you looking to connect with me?”

“I think we already have,” Hannibal stated, confidently. And yes—Will realised—it was true.

*

The old feelings were coming back in full-force; unrelenting and stubborn. All day he was jittery with impatience, waiting for Hannibal to come back from work. It wasn’t even that he wanted to talk to Hannibal. It was just that he felt more stable, and safe when Hannibal was near.

Randall had given Will a bath before he had left, so Will was relieved that he didn’t have to suffer the painful act of feeling Hannibal’s hands run over his skin. Because it would only end in disaster.

Hannibal was usually the one to tuck Will into bed, and this was also something that Will felt he could not trust himself with anymore. He waited, seated in his wheelchair, while Hannibal fetched tea. Reading and sipping on herbal tea had surprisingly become something that Will found himself liking.

When Hannibal returned, he set the tea set down and prepared to lift Will into bed—but then he stopped when he saw Will’s face.

“Is there something wrong, Will?” How many times had Hannibal asked him that, and how had Hannibal not become impatient with that question?

“No,” Will replied, though he knew that it was showing in his face—on his reddening cheeks. Hannibal leaned down and placed a hand on Will’s arm. At this point, it was just impossible to hide it any longer.

“I’m sorry,” Will said, head down. Hannibal kneeled down properly, and tilted his head to peer into Will’s eyes. His hand on the cast moved to gently push it out of the way, away from his crotch. Will could feel his blood rush in his ears. For a second, he thought Hannibal’s face would twist into an ugly expression of disgust. But instead, Will saw a sparkle in his eyes. The corners of his mouth lifted up into a smile.

“That’s nothing to be sorry about, Will.” Hannibal said. He shifted his hand onto Will’s naked thigh, right below the hem. Will felt his breath hitch, and his eyes flutter. He felt like he could faint with how intimate the touch was, although Hannibal had touched him a million times already. Hannibal’s hand moved up, closer to where Will was burning. Will felt his hand clench by his side.

“If you will let me, I can provide relief,” Hannibal said, deadpan.

Will couldn't believe it was really happening. He stared at Hannibal as if suddenly he might wake up from a dream.

"Say you want this," Hannibal said. His hand finally made its way to the place between Will's thighs where the robe was parted. "So I know for sure,"

Will nodded, almost too eagerly.

Hannibal was smiling, a glint of amusement in his eyes. He was enjoying how much Will was suffering. "Say it, Will. I want to hear it from your lips,"

Will gulped and croaked: "I want this,"

"You want me to?"

"I want you to touch me,"

Hannibal's smile really bloomed now. His hand pulled at the belt of the robe, as if he were unwrapping a present. His hand was warm, and it felt heavenly. Will closed his eyes and sighed.

"Look at you," Hannibal whispered, his voice so low that it was almost gruff. "You're trembling,"

"Please," Will said. He wasn't sure whether he was asking Hannibal to stop saying such things, or to simply provide him relief.

Hannibal rubbed his thumb over the wet tip of Will's cock.

"Oh God," Will gasped. His toes were curling.

Hannibal moved closer and pushed away at Will's knees to make more space for himself. He leaned his face closer and dribbled out saliva directly onto Will's cock. His hand started moving, at a torturously slow pace.

"How long have you been thinking about this, Will?" Hannibal asked. "Why didn't you tell me sooner?"

Will's face was already flushed, but he felt himself grow hotter. Frankly, he didn't know when exactly he had started wanting it. What he was feeling and what he had been feeling—or not—it was all beginning to be a blur. *Now* he was really helpless: he didn't know how to answer Hannibal.

But Hannibal was having mercy on him: "I promise to pay attention to you more closely from tonight,"

Gratitude spilled all over Will. But was Hannibal doing this on purpose? Was he doing this to make Will indebted to Hannibal in every way possible? Will's so-called life: it all belonged to Hannibal now. Not even his body was his own anymore.

For a second, Will had thought of pulling away. Of possibly thinking his life over. But Hannibal's hand was relentless and expert. Will gasped in shock as Hannibal stooped low and closed his mouth around Will's cock.

"Hannibal—" Will gasped. For some reason, he hadn't expected it to go this far. For some reason, he felt like it was beneath Hannibal.

Hannibal stopped and looked up. "Yes, Will?"

"You don't have to—if you don't want to…"

Hannibal smiled but it was close to a sneer. "But I want to, Will." Hannibal replied. "I would do anything for you."

It was almost too much—too good—to hear such words. Hannibal returned to what he was doing. It felt undeniably good: when was the last time someone had even done this for Will? He raised his unbroken hand and reached shakily to rest at Hannibal's forearm, in an attempt to feel more of Hannibal. He wished that he had the courage to let his hand roam—to be unapologetic in his want. He wished it could be more; he wished to lay down body to body with Hannibal against him; on top of him.

"I'm going to come," Will whispered, a few minutes in. Before Will could think of where to direct his spill, Hannibal took it all into his mouth. Every last drop, consumed. "F-fuck—" Will gasped. He hadn't felt this intense in a long time.

Thank you," he whispered to Hannibal.

"I told you I will take care of you, Will." Hannibal replied.

Will blinked in disbelief. Behind the fog of his mind, he had decided—realised, that he would do anything for Hannibal too.

*

That night, Will stared up at the ceiling, feeling terribly…*lonely.*

Of course, there was a lot of confusion regarding how they were going to move past this. And where did they stand now with each other? What kind of relationship was this, exactly?

A saner person would probably label this as something bordering...manipulation. Will was injured, and they barely knew each other. Someone could easily say that Will had been taken advantage of. But why then, didn't Hannibal demand the same from Will? Why had it felt so good? Why then, had it felt so *right?*

*

The following week was agony.

Will needed some kind of assurance that what had happened hadn't been something that had been done to him because it was a necessity. It was easy to think that it hadn't meant much to

Hannibal, because there hadn't been a kiss.

But it had to mean something to Hannibal too, right?

Something else was endlessly bothering Will: he wanted to do the same for Hannibal.

Hannibal remained his composed self, as if he was enjoying tormenting Will like this.

He helped Will practice with the crutches, and would let his hands linger just a little longer than necessary on Will; waiting as if checking for the inevitable reaction.

It was cruel, at times.

*

Weekend, Saturday. Hannibal had promised Will to show him his office. Will had found the idea more than intriguing, because it was surely going to provide insight into what Hannibal was like, outside of at home. But he hadn't expected it to be so insanely atmospheric. Hannibal wheeled Will in and left him by his office desk. Will looked up at the rows of books decorating the upper walls, at the framed artwork and what not. It hit him like a blow how wealthy Hannibal must be—these belongings were the stuff of dreams from where Will came from.

Hannibal smiled and observed from afar.

"I feel like I don't belong here at all," Will said, sheepishly.

"Are you up for a therapy session, Will?" Hannibal joked.

Will chuckled. "Wouldn't want to take advantage of you," Will said, but then felt like he had said the wrong thing. "Are those your drawings?" Will pointed his chin to the desk in the corner of the room, which had a few papers on display.

"Yes," Hannibal said.

"Can I see?"

Hannibal helped Will to the table, and then presented a few for closer inspection.

"God," Will gasped. "What can't you do?"

Hannibal smiled. "You flatter me."

Will smiled. He was so immersed in the moment, here in Hannibal's office, looking at Hannibal's many passions—that suddenly, the old familiar feelings of him not deserving all this washed over him again.

"I never thanked you for saving my life," Will said, suddenly. "I've been so ungrateful." He didn't add: *I've been so bad.*

Hannibal looked down at Will, caught in surprise. He smiled and ran a hand through Will's curls. "There is no need," he said.

Will almost said: What have I ever done to deserve all this? To deserve you?

*

Weekend, Sunday. Hannibal was once again completely at Will's service; handing him conveniently-cut sandwiches as they took in the grassy breeze in a park.

"Tell me about your childhood," Hannibal began, out of the blue.

Will chuckled. "You first."

"One's childhood is often the catalyst for the rest of their lives."

"Deflecting again, doctor?"

"Tell me about your mother."

Will laughed. "Never knew her. What does that say about me?"

Will could see that Hannibal was smiling. It felt like if Will stared at Hannibal for too long—he would burst into flames. "I could say something Freudian," he replied. "Or I could say that you were a lonely child. You felt that there was something wrong with you, even before you became aware of your empathy."

Will's heart dropped. It wasn't the accuracy of Hannibal's words. It was that he felt sorry for the child that he had been.

"And your father?" Hannibal asked.

"We moved around a lot. We didn't talk much. I used to watch him fix boat motors and whatnot. That was how we bonded, I guess."

"You learned to observe and keep to yourself. Always the new kid in school."

"Always."

"I was orphaned early on," Hannibal offered, as if in consolation.

Will turned to face Hannibal, fascinated at this enigma of a man. "I'm sorry," he said, for lack of anything better to say.

Hannibal smiled. "It was a long time ago."

Will sighed. How was it that he felt so stunted as a human, while Hannibal, who had been orphaned, was so accomplished?

"Any siblings?" Will asked.

“Mischa. She died.” There was a flitting sorrow reflecting off of Hannibal’s eyes as he said her name.

“She was precious to you.”

“Yes, she was.” Hannibal said, taking a sip from his wineglass.

Will didn’t have the stomach to ask how they had all died. Instead, he offered his hand by placing it on Hannibal’s. It was all that he could do. And this time, he let it linger.

*

At the end of the day, Hannibal massaged Will’s limbs—which was a task usually reserved for Randall, who had more professional hands.

Will couldn’t work out if Hannibal had planned it to be so sensual. It was completely different from how Randall did it. Hannibal’s hands were slower, more searching for any hardness in Will’s muscles. Devilishly lingering.

By the time Hannibal was through, Will was aching for more.

“What’s this?” Hannibal asked, jolting Will from his dream-like haze. Hannibal’s hand was propping up Will’s chin, peering under it.

Will gulped. He had pinched himself so hard there that he had drawn blood. “Must’ve scratched myself in my sleep,” he lied.

Their faces were so close that Will couldn’t *not* glance at Hannibal’s lips. His heart skipped a beat as Hannibal’s eyes flickered to Will’s lips too. And then, it was happening: Hannibal leaned forward and placed a chaste kiss onto Will’s mouth. For a second Will stayed put with shock; but then immediately he felt the urgent need to kiss back. He felt Hannibal steady his face with a hand, and pry his lips open with his tongue. It was everything Will could ask for, and more. Yet, he knew that it would never be enough. When Hannibal pulled back, Will was left hungrier than before. He wanted to say, *Come back.*

Hannibal regarded Will, as if to gauge his reaction, though his reaction had been more than enthusiastic.

“Do you think I should put mittens on your hands when you sleep?” Hannibal asked, fingering at the tips of Will’s fingers. It was difficult to tell if he was joking.

Will, on the other hand, found himself in a quiet rage. It was as if Hannibal was toying with him. Just kiss me again, he wanted to say.

When Will spoke, he couldn’t hide how intense with frustration his voice had become: “Do you like me?”

He didn’t know where the courage to ask the question had come from. And he knew that the answer couldn’t possibly provide him relief. Everything about his situation was so bizarre

that a simple yes or no couldn't possibly be satisfactory. Hannibal's mouth twitched in amusement. "Are you asking if I'm attracted to you?"

Will narrowed his eyes in thought. "Uh…yeah?"

A second passed in which Hannibal looked uncertain, as if Will was out of his mind. "I have thought it to be quite obvious,"

Despite the kiss that they had just shared—despite everything—the answer still came as a shock. The casual way in which Hannibal had spoken also baffled Will. His own attraction to Hannibal wasn't so easy to parade around. It wasn't like he was ashamed of it—it was more that it puzzled him how he had come to be attracted to Hannibal. Especially when he had thought himself straight all his life.

"Is it so outrageous?" Hannibal asked. "You are beautiful, Will,"

Will felt himself grow hot. He knew that he was blushing.

"I must admit your beauty was one of the factors that brought me back to you again and again—when you were in the hospital,"

"Please…that's enough," Will said.

"I'm not simply trying to flatter you, Will." Hannibal replied. "You sought the answer and now you turn away from it."

"I wasn't expecting…this,"

"Then what were you expecting?"

"I don't even know…" Will said. "Just…"

"Is affection so foreign to you?" Hannibal asked.

Will dropped his eyes, realising how lonely he had been all his life. It was a sad picture. He nodded.

Hannibal looked at him as if he was genuinely moved by the admission. He placed a hand under Will's chin, caressing as if to convey that he planned to shower Will with affection. And then he drew in for a kiss again.

*

The next night during dinner, instead of asking another question, Will simply stated what he had been tossing around in his head all night: "I'm attracted to you, too."

He looked away quickly, until he felt Hannibal's eyes boring into him.

"Thank you," Hannibal replied, finally. "I was becoming quite worried,"

Will threw him an angry, sarcastic look.

“I take it you haven’t been with a man before,” Hannibal said.

“Uh—no, never.”

“It must be scary then, what we have been doing.”

It was becoming a little too much to talk so openly about such things. Will felt himself grow hot. He nodded.

“I’ll try not to frighten you,” Hannibal said, a devilish smile on his lips.

Will was slightly alarmed. What else were they going to do together? Of course, he knew how a same-sex relationship worked—but would they ever go that far? Of course, he was in recovery and nothing much could happen right now.

“And you? Have you been with men?” Will asked. “I mean…you don’t have to answer if you don’t want to…”

Hannibal smiled. “I have. Several,”

The answer was more intimidating than Will had expected, though what he had expected, he didn’t know. The image of Hannibal tangled naked with other manly limbs shot a stab of jealousy through Will’s chest. A surprising reaction.

Will imagined how uncomfortable it was going to be to show affection to Hannibal. And how scary it was going to be.

“Did you predict this was going to happen?” Will asked.

“Yes,” Hannibal said. “Otherwise you would’ve said no when I made my proposal. It must’ve been buried deep at the back of your mind, when you said yes to me.”

“That makes sense,” Will replied. Really, it was the only explanation that did make sense.

*

When Hannibal had kissed him for the first time, he had thought—for a second—that everything would then be different, but nothing changed. Or maybe it was more that Will wasn’t allowing that change to happen because he couldn’t fully come to terms with being attracted to Hannibal. Every time he thought about leaning forward and kissing Hannibal—initiating affection—he turned his head away instead. And behind all the thinking, the thought that he didn’t deserve Hannibal lingered, ever-present.

# Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was only inevitable that this was going to happen.

The old gloom was upon him once again, as it had often before—before he had come to live with Hannibal. Yet, he couldn't just label the feeling as just being gloomy or sulky or whatever. It was an invisible force weighing down on his chest, plaguing him with taunts, of how unworthy and useless he was. A waste of space, and a nuisance. For all of Hannibal's reassurances, he had thought that he would be doing better by now. But he knew. It wasn't that easy.

There was no refuge; no escape. No sharp objects within reach, or alcohol to numb his senses. Yet, he knew that he could never do such an ungrateful thing to Hannibal. Because Hannibal wouldn't be angry. Hannibal would silently comfort him and clean up his mess.

So instead, he stared at the ceiling while silent tears streaked down the side of his face, into his ears. He wiped his tears away in front of Randall, and was grateful to him for not inquiring about his obviously blood-shot eyes.

Will had drifted into a restless sleep when he realised that Hannibal was crouching beside his bed, observing him, and running a hand through his hair. "You're home early," Will said with a croaky voice.

"Couldn't stay away," Hannibal lied, obviously worried.

So. Randall had reported back to Hannibal, it seemed.

Will tried smiling but it was useless. He closed his eyes instead, pretending to go back to sleep. He heard Hannibal get to his feet and circle around the bed. Hannibal knew that there wasn't much that he could do. The most that he could do was to hold Will, caress his hands and lay gentle kisses on his temple.

"Tell me what is going through your mind, Will." Hannibal said at last, after a long period of silence.

When Will didn't reply, Hannibal tried instead: "I may not be able to ease your pain but I can listen."

Will shifted a little, as if to show that he was listening. And then he turned his head to look at Hannibal in the eyes.

"Would it be stupid to admit that I'm scared you're gonna grow bored of me? That you're eventually gonna leave me?"

Hannibal's brows shot up a little with surprise. "It's not stupid, but I assure you, Will, I will never tire of you."

"You can't say that—you never know what's gonna happen,"

Hannibal exhaled. "Has it not occurred to you that it might be the same for me? That I may be scared too—that you might tire of me?"

It was a rare admission, and Hannibal was letting Will see him like this. Will remained silent; unbelieving. He still felt shitty but Hannibal's words were definitely helping. He closed his eyes as Hannibal held him tighter.

"But Hannibal—you can have anyone you want. You deserve someone better. Someone who isn't a burden to you—"

"I am going to stop you right there, Will." Hannibal interrupted, which was rare of him. "I want you—and you only."

Will cried anew at those words; his cries muffled against Hannibal's neck. He cried until he was exhausted, and all that was left to do was to come back to Hannibal.

*

The decision to venture out on his own had occurred to him simply because Hannibal had seemed tired that night. Will had grasped his crutches—having had hauled himself up and out of bed, limping on one foot and almost losing balance. When he had taken the first steps out into the hall, he had been astonished at how quiet he had managed to be, and even more so when the task of relieving himself had been accomplished.

Perhaps it had been too early to celebrate his small success. Because as soon as he had switched the light off and exited the bathroom, his good foot—in the process of exiting—had somehow caught the ledge separating the bathroom and the hallway.

The sound that had emanated out of his mouth had been more than loud. He fell hard on his good knee and tumbled forward into the carpet, tangled in his crutches. While he was in the process of making sense of the pain, he saw Hannibal—hovering over him—with a worried face. "I'm sorry," he mumbled out.

Hannibal gently turned him over, swiftly inspecting Will for any injury.

"Hannibal—I'm sorry, I thought—"

"It's alright, Will." he answered. "We'll have to clean this,"

Will looked down as Hannibal held up his unbroken wrist, scraped with a carpet burn. Hannibal pulled away the crutches and set them aside, and then he slid his arms under Will to lift him up.

They entered Will's bedroom, which was dark. Will realised now how dangerous that had been—he hadn't even bothered to turn the lamp on.

Hannibal sat him down and then returned with medical supplies.

Will grimaced as he felt alcohol burn into his skin where the scrapes was bleeding. Hannibal looked into Will's eyes as he bandaged the wound. "I'm not angry, Will." he said. "If that is what you are so worried about." Once the bandage was done, Hannibal rose and came to sit beside Will.

Will nodded thankfully. "It was a stupid thing to do. I thought I'd be okay…"

Hannibal raised a hand and placed it on his knee. "This will bruise." he said. "It was bound to happen. I don't blame you, Will. I'm only disappointed that I couldn't be of help,"

"You've done enough—and I—you looked tired. I didn't wanna wake you up."

Hannibal smiled. "How considerate," he said, and moved his hand to the side of Will's face—where, Will had come to like it the most. "You're not critically injured but anything could've happened. And I cannot allow that."

Will nodded. "You're right," he replied. "Thank you, Hannibal."

"I think some changes are required," Hannibal answered.

"What changes?" Will felt a mixture of excitement and fear swirl around his gut.

"I believe we should share a bed."

"Oh," Will said, nervously. He liked the idea, of course. But it also scared him. "Yes—okay,"

"I think for tonight I'll sleep here, then." Hannibal said. He stood up and helped Will lay down. It was happening too fast. He watched as Hannibal turned the light off and then circled around the bed to lay at the other side. His heart thumped against his rib-cage as he could make out Hannibal's hands in the darkness lift the covers up and cocoon them.

"Comfortable?" Hannibal asked.

"Uh-huh," Will replied. "Thanks for…"

"Think nothing of it. Sleep now, Will."

"Night."

"Goodnight, Will."

*

After that his bedroom was Hannibal's and Hannibal's was Will's. Meaning, his previous bedroom was transformed—enriched, with Hannibal's more luxurious belongings. Reminders of how different he and Hannibal were. The bed remained the same, since it was large enough to accommodate the two of them. Only a few more pillows had been added, and Hannibal

had dragged in his own covers, which somewhat sunk Will's heart because he had liked sharing.

And though the change had been welcome, it had also allowed the truth of what Will was becoming, to be more real.

Whenever he felt Hannibal's limbs brush against his, or felt the ache to have Hannibal's arm under his neck, it was opening up a space inside him that was mercilessly taunting him, trying to tell him to be less needy. It was a natural reaction, he guessed. Until Hannibal, he had never had to be ashamed of feeling attracted to someone. He guessed it was something he should consult Hannibal about, but the words simply didn't come.

It was also scary, because he had never felt this intensely towards anyone before. His mind was tethered to Hannibal, and his hands (the one which could work) longed to caress Hannibal, just as Hannibal did so casually to him.

"Something's on your mind," Hannibal said a couple of days later. It was uncanny how Hannibal could read him so accurately.

"It's nothing," Will replied. He remained stiff as he felt Hannibal turn to lay on his side to look at Will.

"I would like to wait for you until you are ready to talk about it. But I insist we should speak our minds, Will." Hannibal said, marking his place in the book and shutting it.

"It's not something so easy to talk about," Will replied.

"What are you afraid of?"

Will sighed, softly. "I'm finding it hard to come to terms with…"

Hannibal waited, ever so patient.

"That…I think about you all the time. That I need you and…want you," Will said, and then his throat seized up.

Hannibal slid closer until Will felt Hannibal lift a hand to turn his face towards him. Hannibal's eyes lingered all over his face, and then he drew close for a kiss. Will closed his eyes—forgetting everything for that duration—and kissed back. It felt heavenly, to be treated as if he were the most precious thing in the world.

"I want you to feel loved, unconditionally. Until you find that it is nothing to be ashamed of." Hannibal said. "It will be difficult, and sometimes it will overwhelm you. But I want you to get used to it, Will, because you deserve love."

Will felt his eyes lids flutter with oncoming tears. There was no denying now, that Hannibal was good for him. Even his nightmares had started dwindling away since they had started sharing a bed together. "Thank you…Hannibal." Will whispered.

Hannibal caressed his face; stroked his hair until the stuttering sobs were subdued, and Will was able to fall back into sleep.

*

Hannibal had told Will to try to be more vocal about his needs. He said it as if it was an easy thing to do, and it infuriated Will how much time he spent just mulling words over, making up sentences and then turning away from them in disgust.

How to say, he thought, how do I tell him that I desire him…that I want to see him…naked?

What was the right way to go about it?

And also, how to tell Hannibal that Will wanted more, more than the blowjob that Hannibal had given him, which, at the time, had seemed like a lot?

Will prepared himself to lean into Hannibal once Hannibal had turned off the lamp, hoping the message would be easier to convey under cover of darkness.

As soon as Hannibal laid down and extended his arm to lay it under Will's neck, Will held his breath and spoke: but what came out was only Hannibal's name.

"Yes?" Hannibal replied. And when no answer came, he said: "Should I turn the light on?"

"No!" Will gasped, all of a sudden feeling his heart-rate spike.

Hannibal remained silent, assessing the situation. "Tell me what's wrong,"

"Nothing, just…" Will gulped. "want to kiss you," was all that came out.

There was a moment in which Will could almost hear Hannibal's puzzlement. And then he leaned closer. Will felt a hand against his face, a thumb brushing his bottom lip. "Why so nervous, Will?" Hannibal teased. "I can practically hear your heartbeat,"

Will laughed in nervousness.

"It's only me," Hannibal whispered.

"You make me feel like…I can't describe it in words." Will said. What he wanted to say was that he felt like he was in love, but also like he wanted to impress Hannibal, and that Hannibal couldn't possibly like Will as much as he liked Hannibal. But there was also something inherently mysterious and puzzling about Hannibal. And it felt like no matter how much Will would try, he would never get to see the true Hannibal. And therefore, never get to know the real reason that Hannibal had decided to take care of Will.

"All I seem to do these days is think about you…" murmured Will, shakily.

"In what way? Pray tell." mused Hannibal, caressing Will's jaw.

Will paused. He felt a little irritated that they were having a discussion now instead of just kissing.

“Like, in a good way.” Will replied.

“I would like a better description,”

“Fine. Like, you know. In a sexual way. And other ways too.”

“Yes?” Hannibal said, voice laced with excitement. “What do you imagine, Will?” His hand slithered down to Will’s neck, until Will felt a finger trace down his chest.

Will felt something like arousal course through him. “I…want to touch you. See you naked. And, I like that I’m allowed that. I like that I’m the only one allowed to see you like that…”

Will felt Hannibal lean down and press his lips on his chest, right where the bathrobe’s neckline revealed skin. It was more than he had asked for. Will lifted his only usable hand and placed it on Hannibal’s head, hoping to run it through his hair. “Can I?” he asked.

Hannibal’s voice was nearer, as if he was looking up. “You need not ask permission, Will.” And then he leaned down again, pulling open Will’s bath robe to reveal more skin to be kissed. Will felt his breath hitch. He was already fully aroused, and Hannibal hadn’t even done anything. He frowned now, suddenly remembering that it was Hannibal’s pleasure that he had been after, not his own. Before he could speak, Hannibal gently pressed his knee between Will’s legs and made an approving sound. Will had been found out.

“Hannibal?” called Will.

“Yes, Will?”

“Can you come here? Please?”

Hannibal, for once, did as he was asked, and took hold of Will’s jaw as if Will was about to turn away. The kiss felt almost forceful, and invasive. Will wondered where the ferocity had come from; and then Hannibal grabbed his hand and pressed it against Hannibal’s erection, to prove a point.

Will gasped, as if in a mixture of fear and arousal. There was no way he was confidently going to be able to do all the things that he had imagined doing with Hannibal.

“Shall I turn the light on?” Hannibal asked.

“I—no, please.”

“Why? Don’t you want to see me naked?”

“I’m scared,”

“Of?”

“I—I don’t know.”

“Will—you are the best thing that has happened to me. You can do no wrong in my eyes.” Hannibal said. “That being said, I wouldn’t want to scare you. For now, let us take things slow.”

“Thanks,” Will replied, still shocked at what Hannibal had admitted to.

Hannibal leaned down and kissed him again. He let go of Will’s hand, as if giving permission to do whatever Will pleased. Will kept his hand where it was, pressed against Hannibal’s erection. And then he shakily made his way up until he could slip his hand through Hannibal’s pants. First he felt hair against his fingers—which oddly excited him to no end—and then the hard, daunting, protruding thing that was Hannibal’s cock. Will inhaled sharply as he closed his hand around it.

Hannibal exhaled against Will’s ear. “You have no idea, Will.” he said. “How much you mean to me. How much you excite me.”

Will felt almost dizzy with the words. He ran a thumb against the head of Hannibal’s cock, wet at the tip. For a second he considered lifting his hand to his lips and tasting Hannibal’s pre-come. “Do you like me that much?” Will whispered.

“You drive me crazy,” Hannibal replied, voice gruff with arousal.

Will began moving his hand—and at least he knew how to do this.

“Tell me if you feel like stopping,” Hannibal said.

Do you think I’m gonna chicken out? Will almost said—but he didn’t really want to be having a conversation now. He wanted to hear the sounds that he could pull out of Hannibal; the way that he’d breathe when he was close to orgasm.

Hannibal caressed the sides of Will’s face; bunched up his fingers into Will’s hair—balancing himself on his elbows over Will’s body as Will jerked him off. He wished that he had the courage to turn the lamp on, to see what Hannibal’s eyes looked like, when he wasn’t in full control of himself.

Hannibal’s face was so close that his nose bumped against Will’s, so Will just shifted until his mouth was pressed against Hannibal's. It was even better like this: he could hear and feel the trembling; could sense how close Hannibal was.

Will couldn’t help from gasping when Hannibal slid his hand down and began stroking Will’s cock—and Will allowed this, because suddenly, it was important to him that they finish together. Will kept his mouth glued to Hannibal’s, and they swallowed each others’s cries as they came.

When Hannibal thumped beside him on the bed, Will felt at a loss for words. He turned to look at Hannibal as if to check if he was real—just because it had felt so good—it just hadn’t

seemed real. But really, he could only see a faint outline of Hannibal in the darkness, which made what had happened seem more so like a dream.

After a moment Hannibal got up and came back with a warm towel. “I hope this leaves out any doubt about how I feel about you,” Hannibal said, cleaning the come on Will’s stomach. “Would you like to discuss what has just happened?”

“Still trying to process it,” Will replied, too blissed out to think. “But that felt so fucking good,”

He heard a chuckle from Hannibal, which in turn made him chuckle too.

*

“Do we have to talk about it?” Will asked, the next day.

“Not exactly—but it may help you come to terms with it.” Hannibal replied. “Did you like doing it?”

Will gulped, nervous to be talking about it. Of course he had liked it. He hadn’t been able to stop thinking about it—the way Hannibal had sounded; the way his hands had grabbed at Will’s hair. He'd have an erection now if he kept thinking about it. “Yes,” Will replied. “But you know that.”

“I wouldn’t want you to feel that I forced you into this,” Hannibal said with worrisome eyes.

“You’re not—I really did like it. I want—” Will stopped, suddenly realising that this time, he couldn’t hide in darkness. But he trudged on: “—I want to do it again.”

Hannibal smiled fondly, and then leaned over to kiss Will on the lips. Will felt his breath hitch with surprise and pleasure. *This* was also what he had been dreaming about all day.

“How can you possibly like me knowing what’s in my head?” Will asked, after Hannibal pulled away.

“You treat your mind like it’s a curse,” Hannibal said. “But to me, it’s a gift, Will.”

*

Things progressed slowly. The next time Will initiated for intimacy, it was just before Hannibal was going to help him into bed. “Wait,” Will said, seated on the edge of the bed, looking up at Hannibal. He lifted his hand, placed it at the side of Hannibal’s waist and slowly—and, he hoped, sensually—slid it down in what he hoped felt like a caress. Hannibal’s expression shifted, as if immediately knowing what was happening.

“I want to see you,” Will said, quivering with nervousness. But he knew that Hannibal wouldn’t deny him, ever. He hooked his fingers into the waistband of Hannibal’s pants and pulled at it playfully. “Please?” He moved his hand and touched it to Hannibal’s cock, which, to his delight, was growing. “Please?”

Hannibal sighed playfully, as if Will was the devil incarnate. “You don’t know the power your eyes have, Will.” Hannibal said, dropping away his shirt. “You tempt me,”

Will could only stare back for a second. His eyes dropped to Hannibal’s powerful and broad chest—“Oh God,” he said, without even realising.

Hannibal stopped midway, as if gathering that it had suddenly become too much for Will. As if Hannibal’s masculinity viewed under bright lights was making Will have second-thoughts.

“No, keep going,” Will smiled, encouraging. He had to calm himself when Hannibal dropped his pants, and stood before him fully naked. “Oh God…come here,” he said. “I want to touch you.”

Hannibal came near and dropped to his knees, giving himself away to Will. Will lifted his hand and ran it first to Hannibal’s left shoulder, feeling out the muscles. He travelled his hand so that it moved away from the neck—so that he could feel the bones graze the pad of his fingers. Naturally, the hand moved down to Hannibal’s arm, to the bicep, where Will squeezed and marvelled in pleasant surprise. He liked the feel of the muscle there, liked that it was larger in size than his own—probably stronger too.

“Is this okay?” Will asked, just so that he could lessen the tension between them—to soften the intense way in which Hannibal was watching him.

“Of course, Will.” Hannibal said. His hands were patiently set on both of Will’s knees. “I would let you do anything,”

Will chuckled. “You can’t say things like that, Hannibal.” Now he brought his palm flat against Hannibal’s sternum, and then felt around, liking the feel of Hannibal’s chest hair.

“Why not?”

“I could hold those words against you in the future,” Will said. “It also forces me to promise you the same.”

Hannibal made a sound as if he was highly pleased.

“The thing is that of course—of course I would let you do anything to me, too.” He didn’t know what had made him say it, but he wanted to return the favour to Hannibal. “Come closer—I want to kiss you.”

Hannibal did so, the kiss growing heated as Will lowered his hand and grabbed at Hannibal erection. “I look at you and think—where have you been all my life,” Will said, when Hannibal broke the kiss.

“Oh, Will.” Hannibal sighed, hands clutching at Will’s face.

“Can I suck you?” Will asked, before he could chicken out. He’d been thinking about it for so long—had been fantasising about it.

Hannibal looked at him—taken aback—playful but wary. “Are you sure?”

“Yes—I’ve been thinking about it,”

Hannibal stood up then, and it was already a little too much. He wanted it badly—but what if he wasn’t good enough?

“You can stop anytime,” Hannibal said.

“Okay,” Will replied, and opened his mouth in wait. He tried not to think about how he must’ve looked like. Hannibal traced his fingers to Will’s mouth: finally, the wet tip of his cock caught Will’s lips. Will brought his tongue forward to taste, a coil of desire undeniably wrenching through his body. It felt taboo, and it felt exciting—like something he shouldn’t have been doing, or something that he didn’t deserve to have. Will opened wide and took in more of Hannibal’s length—confident now, knowing that this wasn’t something that was one-sided; that was aimed to please only the receiver. He liked it instantly—and he couldn’t deny it. Hannibal’s hand guided how much Will was to take, and Will felt grateful for that. He lifted his hand and rested it against Hannibal’s thigh, feeling out the strong muscles.

“Look at me, Will.” Hannibal said, making a pleased sound when Will obeyed. He could hear Hannibal’s accelerating breath as Will slightly increased his speed—he could feel Hannibal almost on the verge of climax.

“I want to see you touch yourself,” Hannibal whispered, and Will did it unquestioningly. And then Hannibal grabbed Will’s hair in a strong hold—it was almost painful, but Will was surprised to find that he liked it.

Hannibal took control now, thrusting into Will’s mouth.

Hannibal was fucking his mouth. Hannibal was using his mouth for pleasure—Will felt an undeniable thrill course through him. He liked whatever this feeling was, of being so helpless and so utterly at Hannibal’s mercy. Of submitting himself to Hannibal. He moaned and came with Hannibal’s cock still thrusting into his mouth.

Hannibal followed, filling Will’s mouth with come—and expecting it to be swallowed. Will did so obediently. It was somehow really important and urgent to him that he please Hannibal.

He then felt Hannibal move down to kneel again, hovering over to his stomach where his own come had landed. He watched as Hannibal lapped at his come, fingers running over his skin to detect if he had left any spots. And then he took hold to Will’s hand and licked his fingers clean too.

“How are you even real…” Will wondered, out loud.

Hannibal smiled sheepishly, and then righted himself to look at Will, as if expecting a flood of shame to overcome him. But Will could only look back in wonder—he had been given the opportunity to see another side of Hannibal.

“Thank you for that,” Will said, staring at Hannibal as if in a trance.

*

Hannibal was baking Halloween cookies to hand out at a charity event that was taking place the next day. He had invited Will—but of course, Will wasn't so keen on it. Obviously, because he hated crowds—and also because he was too ashamed to be in a wheelchair in public.

"There's no shame in being in a wheelchair," Hannibal had tried to convince him.

"Not happening." Will had replied, feeling like his mood was turning sour. Of course he was happy to see Hannibal enjoy things—he was also happy that Hannibal enjoyed things without him. But he knew that he was going to be forever insecure about being left behind. There was nothing really, that he could do.

"But you never go anywhere," Hannibal said, not too seriously.

"I don't want to go anywhere," Will said. And then, though it took a lot out of him to say it: "I have all that I need right here."

That, had at least earned him a kiss.

So Will watched from his place in the lone sofa that was in the corner of Hannibal's kitchen, happy *not* to help—he was perfectly content with watching Hannibal bake. And for the first time in his life—Will wanted to memorise these moments; keep it stored away in his brain for his future self. He wanted to hold on to these images of Hannibal—Hannibal, who was so thoughtful and unlike any other person Will had ever met.

"Do they do Halloween in Lithuania?" Will asked.

Hannibal smiled—"I hear it is popular among youths now,"

"Did you ever do dress up?" Will tried to imagine a child Hannibal as Dracula, and laughed to himself.

"Are we not always dressing up in our everyday lives?"

"God—you're such a psychiatrist," Will huffed.

"I didn't—but I imagine you did,"

"Yeah—until I got too old. I remember this one time a boy in my class decided to show up as Pogo the Clown."

Hannibal looked up, in amused shock.

Will laughed. "Yeah—the whole school was in a frenzy—it was a fun day. We got dismissed early."

Though he had mentioned it himself, now Will was stuck on thinking about serial killers. Inevitably, he thought of The Chesapeake Ripper—the one who had evaded Jack Crawford

for so long.

“What are you thinking, Will?” Hannibal said.

Will only smiled. “Nothing—just…”

“You looked like you had some harrowing thoughts.”

“Just…you know. Thinking of Gacy got me thinking of others.”

“Others?”

“Other killers.” Will said.

“Like who?”

“The Chesapeake Ripper.” Will answered, aware that he might be souring this homely atmosphere. “We don’t have to talk about it.”

“Tell me, Will. So what do you think about the Ripper?” Hannibal asked, somewhat of a hint of amusement in his voice.

“Hannibal…you don’t have to.”

“But I’m interested,” Hannibal said.

“Why?”

“Because I’m interested in you.”

“There’s nothing interesting about me.”

“I beg to differ, Will.”

“I want to know about you! You never tell me anything!” It was meant to sound playful.

“What would you want to know? Ask away,”

“You know...I feel like I’ve gotta earn that information.” Will admitted.

“I would tell you anything. I’d like to share with you, as I’d like you to share with me.”

Will paused, his mind suddenly latching onto a different thought. “Are we…in a relationship?”

“Does the idea of being in a relationship with me appeal to you?”

Will thought about it. He knew what he felt about it—but it wasn’t like he could tell Hannibal what he felt. He nodded, weakly.

“What were your previous relationships like?” Hannibal asked.

“Never really had anything serious. I think too much,” Will said. “Relationships mean having to keep up with somebody, having to be vulnerable around them. I was just not cut out for that.”

“And what about sex?”

“Nothing more than something to be gotten over with as quickly as possible.” Will replied. “There was always guilt involved after. And a sense of…disgust with myself.”

“Do you know why that is?”

“I…don’t like to think about it,”

“Will you tell me?” Hannibal asked, his hands busy with measuring sugar.

Will gulped, turned away. “Can we skip this part?”

“Running away, again? Will?”

“Please.”

“I apologise I brought it up,” Hannibal said. “Don’t you wish there was someone who could understand you? See you?”

“I gave up that possibility a long time ago,” Will said, and then regretted it, because it sounded insulting. “Sorry. I didn’t mean that. I just don’t want to show you my ugly, broken parts.”

Hannibal looked up, his hands stopping mid-movement. “What makes you think I wouldn’t like your ugly, broken parts as well? I have flaws too.”

“Hannibal, if perfect was a thing, you’d be the definition of it.”

They let the matter rest for the time-being; or, Hannibal agreed to withdraw. But Will was sure it was gonna come back and bite him in the ass later.

*

Will was picking at a scab on his thigh, absent-mindedly. He smiled when Hannibal appeared to him, dressed in a tuxedo. “You look so—” Will gulped, looked at the floor. “handsome.”

Hannibal was smiling—Will could sense it. “Thank you, Will.” And then Hannibal approached, kneeling in front of him and taking Will’s hands between his. “You shouldn’t pick at scabs,”

Will laughed, uneasily. “It’s almost impossible not to.”

“Are you anxious?”

What would Hannibal do if Will said yes? Would he stay and not go to that stupid charity event? “I’m okay,”

“I will be back around midnight. Don’t stay up,” Hannibal said. “Text me if you need anything.”

“Okay,” Will nodded. He didn’t want to go to bed alone without Hannibal by his side. He also couldn’t help but feel a stab of hurt as his mind imagined scenarios where Hannibal was having fun with other people. Drinking and laughing with them. Dancing with them.

Hannibal leaned closer then—took his face in his hands the way he liked to—and kissed him deeply on the mouth. Will raised his own hand and placed it gently against the satin of the lapel, imagining the side of his head pressed there, as they danced.

“Know that I would rather be spending this evening with you.” Hannibal said, pulling away.

Will couldn’t help but smile. “You’re gonna be late, Hannibal.”

When Hannibal finally went, Will felt the bitterness return. He didn’t want to be jealous, or spiteful. But he just couldn’t stop himself from feeling as if something had been ripped out of his chest.

*

Without Hannibal or Randall to help him, Will struggled as he dragged himself into bed. Eventually he managed to get comfortable enough—but then when he closed his eyes and tried to sleep, all he could think about was that he hated himself for feeling the way that he did. What was the root of this feeling that made his eyes tear up now?

Will wiped at his eyes with the edge of his sleeve and tried to do some problem solving with himself.

The root of this problem was that he had abandonment issues, to put it plainly.

Maybe this was also the reason why Will couldn’t completely commit to having Hannibal inside his head. But clearly, he had become too attached to Hannibal now—and the result was this.

Will huffed and picked up a book—and then another, but nothing was keeping his attention. So he put it aside and stared into the ceiling, until minutes turned into hours. Maybe for the first time in a long time, he felt a thirst for a drink of whiskey. He craved that feeling of being so numb that he couldn’t think—but he didn’t want to do that to Hannibal. Because Hannibal would forgive him, and somehow twist the narrative so that the fault was laid on Hannibal, and not Will.

*

Midnight was approaching, and Will still hadn’t been able to sleep. He sat up and dragged himself out of bed, taking hold of the hateful crutches that made him feel worthless and

useless. It took a lot of time to walk with them—he still wasn't used to them, so he sat himself on his wheelchair, which he hated even more.

Too much of anything was a bad thing. Will—like everyone else—had learned that at some point in life. Was it bad that he wanted too much of Hannibal, he wondered. Would all this want and need somehow end in something bad—because didn't everything have a consequence?

He waited close by the door for Hannibal to walk in. Would Hannibal look at him, so clingy like this and deem Will to be a pathetic, needy thing? But it didn't matter. Hannibal wouldn't throw him away like that. He had promised to take care of him. He had promised that it would work out. Will had to believe him.

Finally, more than thirty minutes later, Will heard the door unlock, and in a panic Will thought of running to his room. But then he realised that he couldn't run.

Hannibal entered—there were fluffs of snow in his hair—his bowtie was undone. Will felt his heart leap.

Hannibal paused—a split second of panic glinted in his eyes, which scanned at Will's body as if looking for any injury. Then, he shut the door behind him. "What's wrong, Will?" Hannibal asked, drawing near and placing a hand against Will's forehead, checking for fever.

"I just—" Will gulped.

Hannibal waited, patiently. Sometimes it was really impressive how much he could wait.

"I just missed you," Will answered, timidly; evading eye-contact yet again. "Couldn't wait to see you,"

When Will looked up, he saw a warmth pass through Hannibal's face. He leaned down and placed a hand against the side of Will's face. "I missed you too, Will."

Will smiled nervously. He couldn't work out why he suddenly wanted to cry. He tried to lean closer to Hannibal for an embrace. But Hannibal stepped closer instead, and closed both arms around Will.

"You feel like home to me, Will." Hannibal said against Will's hair.

Chapter End Notes

Yall I'm sorry nothing much is happening but I promise, things are gonna pick up next chapter. Thanks for reading!

# Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

TW: MURDER!!!!

The Tiramisu was exceptional. Will audibly moaned and caught himself, embarrassed. “Sorry,” he said.

Hannibal only smiled back. “Good?”

“This might be the best thing I’ve ever had in my life,” Will admitted. If it was polite to do so, he would’ve kissed Hannibal right there and then. “Thank you,” he said, instead.

“Anything for you,” Hannibal replied.

Will blushed at that—thought uneasily about what else Hannibal would do for him.

Suddenly, he heard Hannibal’s phone vibrate in urgent successions in his pocket. Normally, Hannibal would ignore any texts, but it seemed urgent.

“Excuse me, Will.” he said, fishing out his phone.

“Sure,” Will said, returning to his dessert.

Hannibal stilled as he looked at his phone, and then set his spoon down. It was obvious that something was wrong.

“Everything okay?” Will asked.

Hannibal set the phone down. He could’ve acted as if nothing was the matter, but it was clear that he was thinking about something.

“Hannibal?” Will asked again, reaching for Hannibal’s hand. Hannibal looked up and smiled at the touch, and squeezed back.

“It’s Jack Crawford—there’s been another article about you from Ms. Lounds,” he said.

“Oh,” it was all that Will could say. He could feel his mind starting to shut down.

Hannibal sighed. “Do you want to see?”

Will thought about it for a moment. What good could that possibly do for him? All he wanted was to be left alone—and here the world was again, trying to evade his peace. He set his

spoon down, obviously distressed. “No,” he answered. He was almost at the verge of angry tears—so he rubbed at his face instead. “Does it say that I’m insane and whatnot?”

“Yes—and Jack wants to know what to do about it since the article concerns you.”

Will chuckled, bitterly. “Let him do what he wants. I don’t care anymore.”

Hannibal nudged at Will’s hand until Will was forced to look at him. “I’m not one to tell you how to feel, Will, but—this has upset you.” Hannibal said. “Do you want to talk about it?”

Will thought again, for longer than was necessary. He was supposed to share the unfiltered truth with Hannibal. He was supposed to be honest about what he felt. He wanted to, badly.

“What are you thinking of?” Hannibal tried, rubbing his thumb on Will’s skin.

Will chuckled, nervously. “My—my thoughts are tainted. Blood-drenched.” Really, he didn't feel safe with the hateful thoughts that he was having now. It was a natural reaction—he had been wronged, and he was feeling spiteful. But—was it a natural reaction to want to murder someone?

Hannibal considered this, and urged: “Tell me,”

Will laughed. “What I want to do is to slit her throat,” He was so angry now that he didn’t realise that he had thought out loud. “Watch her die slowly as she’s unable to cry out for help,”

Hannibal’s eyes were shocked, but glittering. “Truly, I could never predict you, Will.” he said, leaning over and kissing Will deeply on the mouth. The rage in Will was still burning, and it fuelled him into kissing Hannibal more ferociously than Hannibal had intended. He was hungry, all of a sudden. His uninjured hand he brought up to tangle in Hannibal’s hair, as if to keep him from escaping. When Hannibal pulled back, it was only then that he remembered what he let himself say, so proudly.

But Hannibal merely smiled and collected Will’s empty plate for washing.

*

It had felt like a perfectly normal day—until it hadn’t. It was the weekend, which meant complete attention from Hannibal, but apparently Hannibal had an errand to run. Will had received a kiss and smiled as he waved goodbye.

When Hannibal had returned, it was lunchtime already—and Will was served an elegant dish of fettuccine carbonara—he remembered distinctly mentioning to Hannibal that he had been craving it. And then Hannibal appeared with a head of truffle, shaving it onto the dish—which—Will concluded, had been the reason that Hannibal had been out.

“I have a surprise for you, Will,” Hannibal said, as Will swallowed the final bite.

“Wasn’t this the surprise?” Will asked, smiling.

Hannibal smiled back. “That—was a small part of it.”

“Okay,” Will answered. He remained unmoving, somehow dreading whatever this surprise was. He hated surprises, because people had never been able to gift him things that he actually liked or found useful. He had faith in Hannibal not to miss but he wondered what Hannibal could give him now, seeing as he had all the things that he wanted and needed at his fingertips.

“One moment,” Hannibal said, and rose. He paused to press a kiss onto Will’s temple, and was gone in a flash. When he came back, it wasn’t with a ribboned box. “Come along,” Hannibal said, scooping Will up in his arms.

“Where are we going?” Will asked, half-joking. “What kinda surprise is this, even?”

“Patience,” Hannibal said, merely.

Will smiled in anticipation but grew uneasy as he saw that there was a hole in the ground of the kitchen—a seamless trapdoor of a sort—which led to a basement. Hannibal began descending the stairs. Perhaps from shock, Will kept quiet and didn’t speak until he saw how vast—and creepy—this darkened space was. For a second, he imagined Hannibal leading him down here and leaving him in this dark space. No—Hannibal would never do that. Will was only panicking. “What is this?” he whispered. He expected Hannibal to have a perfect answer that explained everything to him, but instead he heard an unmistakable whimper of a female voice, somewhere from within the darkness.

Will saw his crutches propped up against a table and took to supporting himself when Hannibal set him down. He was too much in shock, and concluded that he had hallucinated the whimper—but then Hannibal turned on the lights—and Will saw none other than Freddie Lounds, bound to a chair and rendered speechless by a gag in her mouth.

Hannibal came to stand beside Will, laying a hand around his shoulder. He peered at Will, lovingly.

Will gulped, and felt his throat go dry.

Freddie was looking from him to Hannibal frantically, as if it was obvious that Will was going to save her. Her entire being was shaking uncontrollably; trying to break free of the ropes, but nothing was working. She tried to yell through the wad of fabric in her mouth.

“Hannibal—” he said, knowing exactly what he was supposed to do. Wasn’t this what he had wanted? “What do you want me to do?” Will asked, calmly. What he meant was, how was he to kill her?

“It’s not what *I* want,” Hannibal replied, voice sweet and thick as honey. “It’s what *you* want.”

Will turned and saw Hannibal holding up a knife to him, one that was obviously sharp just by looking at it. Without thinking, he reached out and received it, turning it over to inspect how sturdy it was.

Hannibal walked over to Freddie and lifted her thrashing and kicking, closer to Will.

Will felt his grip on the knife harden: the moment of truth was now. Should he kill Freddie, or instead, cling onto his last grip on sanity, and plunge the knife into Hannibal instead?

“Any last words, Ms. Lounds?” Hannibal said, his voice laced with amusement and mockery. In one swift motion, he snatched the rag out of her mouth: a mistake. Immediately, Freddie saw her last chance and began rapidly talking.

“Will! Don’t do it! I know there’s good in you, Will,” she pleaded. “You’re not a killer, Will!”

Will almost let out a bitter laugh at that. He tilted his head and watched as she realised that her words—once so damning and sharp—were proving to be futile.

“Will, please.” she continued. “I won’t write about you ever again,”

Will merely raised his brows, weirdly amused by her desperation. “Oh?” he said.

“Please, you’re not insane. You save people—”

Something shifted inside Will then. He felt something take over him. Her words, instead of softening him to reconsider, were instead like fuel to a fire. “But I am,” Will said, surprising himself. “I *am* insane.”

Before Freddie had another chance to speak, Will extended his arm and ran the sharp knife across her throat. Immediately, she lost her ability to speak. Glorious blood gushed out and ran down her blouse, streaking down like a fountain.

Will watched calmly and thought about how, just a few minutes earlier, he had been dead-sure that this wasn’t what he had wanted. If he was to go through with it, he was going to do it for Hannibal alone. But now he observed, mesmerised as the blood flowed down: he realised that it was entirely for his own self that he had done it. He was reclaiming the word ‘insane’ for himself. Once he had been labeled it wrongfully, but now it was his. Now that he had admitted to it out loud, it rang true. He *was* insane. He had murder on his bloody hands.

Freddie was retching in pain, slowly bleeding out; almost at the verge of losing consciousness. Will lifted the knife again, probing into the wound slowly—and then in a fit, stabbed her in the chest just once. He watched in silence as life bled out of her.

Will dropped the knife and watched the pooling blood on the floor.

Eventually, he was pulled back into reality by the solid presence of Hannibal behind him, his arms circled around Will’s waist. He leaned back a little and Hannibal placed his chin onto Will’s shoulder. He felt Hannibal turn to caress his lips against Will’s jaw, and then he whispered low against Will’s ear: “You did well, Will. I knew you could do it.”

Will didn’t answer, or offer a smile. But thankfully, Hannibal wasn’t expecting an answer. He sighed in relief as Hannibal carried him upstairs and wiping the blood off of his hands. Will found himself unusually exhausted, and as though Hannibal had notice that, he carried Will

back to their bedroom. Hannibal drew the blanket over him, tucking him up to his chin. “Get some rest. I’ll come wake you up for dinner.” Hannibal said.

*

Dinner.

The thought came slowly to him, creeping up on him, prickling across his skin. Freddie was going to end up as their dinner. He thought back to the countless times he had watched mesmerised as Hannibal’s hands performed their dance of putting together a beautiful, nourishing meal for the both of them.

It was so much of a shock that Will didn’t really know how to feel. He caught himself thinking—trying to justify—that Hannibal must’ve had a reason to kill and consume people; that it was all understandable and forgivable. What frightened him the most about himself, was the lack of remorse that he felt. The sharp and sudden clarity he had felt as he had slit Freddie’s throat.

*

Will woke before Hannibal could wake him. He limped the halls in his crutches, catching the aroma of cooking meat—so utterly unmistakable—drifting in the air. He stood and watched from the entrance to the kitchen: Hannibal, sleeves rolled up to reveal skin and veins which Will had fixated upon, day in and day out. He lifted his eyes to Hannibal’s neck, where he was sure a pulse was beating. Life was running through those veins. Life…

Will had taken a life. He had done it not once as he had, as part of his duty to the FBI, but out of pure spite. And that, had pushed him into the category of someone who was a killer. *I’ve murdered someone,* Will thought. *I feel righteous in having had taken a life.*

*But had it been entirely my choice?*

Just then, Will snapped out of his thoughts as Hannibal called his name, without looking up.

“Just in time,” Hannibal said. “Will you be so kind as to pick us a bottle of wine?”

*

Will smiled politely as Hannibal poured them wine. He didn’t know what else to do, knowing what was on his plate.

Hannibal seated himself and raised his glass. “What would you like to toast to?” he asked.

Will lifted his own glass and raised it, his grip almost too hard. “To…no secrets between us.”

Hannibal smiled, mildly surprised by the unusual words. They clinked their glasses and drank.

“Do you have any questions for me, Will?” Hannibal said, slicing into a piece of meat.

Will nodded, deliberately slowing his movements in taking hold of his cutlery. He wasn't too sure with them still, but he had become quite used to using his left hand to eat. "This meat…" he said, unsure of how to frame his question.

Hannibal looked back almost innocently, so much so, that for a split-second, Will feared that he had been horribly, terribly wrong about the cannibalism.

"Freddie?" Will said.

"Yes," Hannibal answered, finally.

Will nodded. "Thank you for being honest," he said. He gulped, watched as Hannibal took a bite. "One more question,"

"Of course,"

"Am I dining with the Chesapeake Ripper?"

"Yes," Hannibal replied, as if it was the most obvious fact ever.

Will exhaled. "Of course," he said. He tried to feel something but nothing came.

"Do you feel deceived?" Hannibal asked, leaning forward.

Deceived? Will thought for a moment. They had come so far—Hannibal had worked so hard, to be where they were now. Where Will was in the firm clutches of Hannibal's hands. *In love.*

It was hard to ignore the thought that maybe that had been Hannibal's plan all along. But when he lifted his eyes to Hannibal's again, he didn't feel any different. He was still in love. And people in love had the tendency to forgive the unforgivable when it came to their beloved.

Will shook his head, thinking: I should've seen this coming. Hannibal smiled in satisfaction and leaned back into his chair.

What direction were they to go now?

"Do you feel scared?" Hannibal asked, calmly, as if Will was in therapy.

Will gulped. "No," he answered. What was the worse that could happen to him anyway?

Hannibal smiled. Will felt something like thrill run down his spine at how much power Hannibal wielded. And how powerful he was. His lover and keeper—the Chesapeake Ripper.

He also—somewhat reluctantly—felt a curiosity regarding Hannibal's murders. A curiosity to see whether he could sympathise with them.

"Will you tell me about your murders?" he asked.

"Of course," Hannibal replied.

There were so many questions—endless questions. But the one that burned most brightly was: “Have you been feeding them to me all this time?”

There was no remorse in Hannibal’s eyes. “Yes,” he replied, a simple admission, as if it were a harmless one.

Will expected disgust to overtake him. But instead he merely felt a chill, at how skilful Hannibal was. Surprisingly, he accepted this truth. Perhaps there was nothing really, that Will could do about it. He jabbed a piece of meat and popped it into his mouth.

*

That night Hannibal kissed him with a new ferocity that left Will breathless, more than ever before. He opened his mouth to Hannibal; let him do whatever he wanted, because he belonged to Hannibal now. Now, that the murder of Freddie had bonded them.

“How did you feel, Will?” Hannibal asked, breathless himself. “When you slit her throat.”

“Powerful,” Will replied, unbelieving of his own confession. “I’ve never felt anything like it.” It was true: he hadn’t felt so intensely alive as he had when he’d heard the violent tear of her throat being cut open. The sound had been so sickeningly vivid. The blood so…beautiful.

“You deserve to feel powerful, Will.” Hannibal said, trailing his mouth down.

Will sighed, a shooting pleasure building up in his groin. “Thank you, Hannibal.” he whispered.

*

Months had passed and Will had been looking forward to this day. But as the day drew nearer and nearer, a new type of anxiety also began blooming inside of him: until now—not that he was planning to escape from Hannibal—he had been unable to even run. He dreaded what he might do once his cast would come off.

He woke up with a dread, trying to keep these thoughts from taking over. Another worry also poked at him: it was not that he was scared of running into a familiar face—that was impossible, because he hadn’t known many people anyway. He was scared that he might suddenly confess to the world that he had committed a murder.

Hannibal, on the other hand, didn’t acknowledge to Will that he was going to be in a position where he would have a chance to get them both arrested. But the truth was that, Will didn’t need to be told to keep his mouth shut. Because he would never give Hannibal away—or so he thought.

Maybe this was a test of a sort.

When the seat belt clicked into place, that was when Will felt himself really go cold with anxiety. Hannibal seemed to have noticed. He reached over and took hold of his arm in a gesture of reassurance. “You’ll be fine, Will.” he said, smiling.

Will smiled back, albeit uneasily. He disassociated, watching the world go by in a blur. Knowing the source of your anxiety was supposed to alleviate some of it—all you had to do was find a solution—but his mind refused to comply. Talking about it was another way—but this wasn't a subject that could be brought up so casually.

When they finally arrived at the hospital, it was a moment before Will could step out of the car. Hannibal slid his hand through Will's uninjured arm and guided them to the right direction. "Are you alright, Will?" Hannibal asked, as they confirmed their appointment.

"Uh-huh," Will replied, though the lie was obvious.

Hannibal guided him to sit as they waited to be called, but Will could hardly stay still.

"Talk to me, Will." Hannibal encouraged.

"Too overwhelming," Will replied, closing his eyes, trying to breathe. There were the circling thoughts in his head—and there were the people staring at him and Hannibal, probably wondering what relationship they had with each other.

Hannibal looked around. He went away to the receptionist and seemed to be making some sort of a negotiation. "Come," Hannibal said as he came back.

"Where?"

"Somewhere private," Hannibal replied, helping Will stand up.

They walked the halls—guided by the receptionist—to an unused room, which looked like a vacant psychiatrist's room. "Thank you, Ms. Miller," Hannibal said, as the lights were turned on.

"Don't mention it, Dr. Lecter," she nodded politely and closed the door.

Hannibal turned immediately to Will, holding him in a snug embrace. Will buried his face into Hannibal's neck—that heavenly, warm space which had come to feel more and more like a refuge. He felt Hannibal smooth his hand over the back of his head, fingers running through his curls. Will's breathing finally slowed. He wasn't completely calm, but he felt safe.

"Now are you going to tell me what is bothering you?"

"It's stupid," Will replied, voice muffled by Hannibal's jacket.

"Will…" Hannibal began, adopting the voice of a stern parent.

"I think I'm alright now. We can go back."

"Not until you tell me what's wrong," Hannibal tried.

"There's nothing wrong."

Hannibal pulled back to observe Will's face. "Tell me."

Will shrugged. “Just nervous, is all.”

Hannibal lifted a hand and ran it on the side of Will’s face, and then leaned in for a kiss. Will accepted the kiss gratefully, as he had come to do with every form of Hannibal’s touches. “Tell me,” Hannibal persevered.

“Did you just kiss me to coax out a confession?” Will joked.

Hannibal smirked. “At least I tried,” he played along. “Come, the doctor must be waiting for us.”

*

The process of sawing off the cast was stressful enough. The sounds, let alone the sensations of the saw were drilling into Will’s mind, which had come to get too used to peace and quiet at Hannibal’s house. One more second of this and he felt like he was going to lose his mind all over again.

“Just a little more,” Hannibal said in support.

Will nodded, and thought only of Hannibal.

After, the doctor provided instructions to Hannibal for Will’s aftercare. Will waited nearby, out in the waiting room—when he heard someone call his name.

“Mr. Graham,” it was Matthew, the nurse from when Will had been first hospitalised. “Good to see you,”

“Hello,” Will replied, meek. He didn’t really know what to say.

“Are you doing okay?” Matthew stooped down to his level, peering at his face in worry.

“Yeah—I’m fine,” Will replied. He caught Hannibal looking at him from where he was talking with the doctor. “Just got my cast off,”

“It’s going to feel stiff for a while,” Matthew offered. And then: “Are you doing okay after that article by Freddie Lounds? She—” Matthew paused, lowering his voice. “She’s gone missing, and no one knows if she’s away to some other place or what,”

Will felt his throat getting tight. He saw Hannibal shake the doctor’s hand. “I—” All he wanted now, was for Hannibal to come to him and save him. Make it all go away and take him to the safety of their home. He had to act less fidgety, or he might look suspicious. "I actually didn't know she wrote another article," Will said, feigning carelessness.

And then thankfully, Hannibal was in front of him—greeting Matthew.

“Nice to see you, Dr. Lecter,” Matthew said, standing up.

And then Will was being wheeled out—he pretended to be engrossed in his newly exposed skin, pretended that he wasn't having the biggest dilemma of his life: was he going to regret

that he'd missed the chance to ever confess, to ask for help?

*

And just like that, Will was home again. A proper bath was in order, Hannibal had said—and disappeared to run the water. Will leaned onto Hannibal as he undressed, wanting to do everything by himself as much as possible. He had gotten so used to Hannibal, that it seemed strange to be doing anything by himself.

He held Hannibal's hand as he lowered himself into the bath. Everything felt as it had before, before Will had taken a life. Will smiled and received a smile back from Hannibal, and he felt like he could almost forget what had happened earlier in the day.

Hannibal was his usual self: caring, and fully attentive. He massaged Will's muscles where they had gone stiff from months of disuse. He applied moisturiser to the countless scars, some wide and protruding; others scratches but still sensitive. "Your scars are beautiful," Hannibal said. "Like you've been broken and put back together again." He traced a finger on a scar, garishly red against his pale skin. "Like mended porcelain."

Will smiled. Of course Hannibal thought broken things were beautiful.

"Even this one?" Will asked, showing the inside of his wrist.

Hannibal slowly bent down and kissed along the scar. "Especially this,"

As Will dressed—for the first time in months—in pants and a shirt, he felt other worries also circle his head: now that he was going to be free to move around on his own—now that he didn't technically have an excuse to remain under Hannibal's care—he wondered what shape his thoughts were going to turn to.

The murder that he had so blindly committed had been creeping back into his thoughts. Had he acted of his own free will, or had it been his empathy for Hannibal working itself accordingly, that had spurred his hand to make the fatal wound?

Was his mind so unquestioningly empathetic towards Hannibal; was it trying so hard to understand Hannibal, *be* like Hannibal?

Over the next days, these were the thoughts that took place in Will's mind, as if hoping to make permanent residence there. Was he feeling so guilty, was he so bothered that he had not done the right thing? A dreadful idea took root in his mind: did he want to run away?

Hannibal had hired a specialist for Will's physical therapy—and as Will worked through his exercises, feeling himself grow stronger and stronger, he had the bitter taste of betrayal coating his mouth. Here he was, getting better under Hannibal's care—Hannibal, who had never failed to refuse him anything, not even love—and he was thinking of running away from him. Will wondered if Hannibal could taste the betrayal on his mouth when they kissed.

In the end he didn't know what it was exactly that made him decide. Will swung his legs out of bed in the dark; he pretended that he was merely going to the bathroom to relieve himself,

that he would return and tuck himself into bed and go to sleep again. He pretended even when he was already at the front door, fingers curling around the cold door knob. His breath was coming fast, and his heart was beating so fast he was half-afraid that Hannibal was going to hear. It was only then that the idea came to him: I just wanted to go for a walk, he would say.

Yes, he would say that to Hannibal if he was caught. Caught? Being caught meant that what he was doing was wrong, and that there were going to be consequences.

If he was only venturing out for fresh air, then why was he feeling guilty?

Why was he trying to keep quiet?

Will finally opened the door. A gust of cold air hit him, drying the beads of sweat on his face. He descended the steps, knees almost buckling from anxiety.

It was only when he felt his feet step onto cold snow that he realised that he was barefoot. He heard the unmistakable sound of the front door opening again, and turned his head to see Hannibal in his robe staring at him, as if in disappointment. For a moment they looked at each other in absolute stillness. It was as if they could be here stuck in this moment, frozen forever, and that the bad things that were going to happen now would never actually take place. They would be locked in this present moment, the future non-existent. But that was only the thinkings of someone who was delusional. Will's eyes were laced with guilt, he knew. He turned his body towards Hannibal; took a few steps away from him, trying to explain. "I—" He stumbled backwards as his foot caught onto something. He didn't even feel the snow against the back of his body as he fell—all that mattered was that he needed to get away, fast.

Will didn't see Hannibal come down the stairs. When he looked up, he was already there. "Going somewhere?" he asked. His eyes seemed to be completely black.

The excuse that he had thought up just moments ago evaporated off of his tongue. It was futile, whatever Will was going to say from now on. He considered shouting for help, for some reason. He wondered if anyone could see him, sprawled out on the lawn, with Hannibal hovering over him. But he knew that no one would be awake at this hour. A sick thought ran through his head: if he entered Hannibal's house again, no one would know that he had ever existed. He wondered why the thought distressed him now, when once, he had been happy not to exist.

Hannibal bent over him and scooped him up, slung over one shoulder. Will thrashed a little. "Put me down, Hannibal. I can walk!"

But he knew why Hannibal wasn't letting him walk. He didn't want to give Will the chance to run. To escape.

Will felt himself thrown down onto the floor of the hallway, panicking as he heard the front door being shut. He righted himself to his knees as Hannibal approached; standing over him, sighing and then crossing his arms. It was frightening, this new face that Hannibal was showing Will. He had never seen Hannibal this angry before. But it wasn't just anger, of

course. It was anger and disappointment, and a certain glint in his eyes as if he was resisting the urge to strike Will across the face.

“Do you remember what I said to you once, Will?” Hannibal asked, tilting his face to meet Will’s eyes.

Will whimpered and kept his eyes down. “I’m sorry—”

“Remind me of what I said,” Hannibal demanded, reaching down and pulling at Will’s hair to make him look Hannibal in the eye.

Will looked up teary eyed, and choked out: “You’ll take care of me,”

Hannibal nodded, tightening his hold. “You need me, Will.” he said. His voice had taken on a different kind of tone, one that Will had never heard before. “Say it.”

Will nodded, frantically. “I need you, Hannibal.” He bent down and curled his arms around Hannibal’s ankles, head on Hannibal’s feet. “I need you—please, I won’t do it again.”

Hannibal went still. When Will looked up, Hannibal was different. A little closer to the Hannibal that Will had known and lived with. Hannibal ran a hand through his hair and then sighed. “It’s okay, Will.”

Will held onto Hannibal as he let himself be carried back to his room. He observed Hannibal’s face closely as he was being laid down, and felt that Hannibal wasn’t fully convinced when Will had repeated after him that he needed Hannibal. He caught Hannibal by the sleeve just as he was about to turn the light off.

“Hannibal?” he whispered. There was an urge in him to make everything right as it had been. He wished, truly, that he hadn’t gotten up from bed in the first place.

Hannibal looked down at him, coldly. It made Will flinch with hurt.

“I’m really sorry,” Will repeated.

No reply came, but Hannibal listened, as if he wanted to see how much more Will would make a fool out of himself.

“I really mean it.” The words felt true coming out of his mouth, but they didn’t seem to faze Hannibal. “I want to be dependent only on you,” Will said. “And…to please you.”

There was a microscopic change in the way Hannibal’s lips were resting. He nodded, once. Then he reached down, and placed a kiss on Will’s forehead.

Will reached out again to take hold of Hannibal’s robe, to plant a kiss on his lips. To spur him into having sex, so that at least they could temporarily forget about what had happened in the heat of the moment.

But Hannibal moved away, and swiftly turned the light off.

As the room darkened once again, and Hannibal stepped out of the room, Will hoped that his punishment would only extend to him being denied affection. He wished that everything would return to normal.

# Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

> Sorry for the delay. Been dealing with health problems, hope you all understand.
>
> Warning, because this chapter marks the beginning of a shift in Hannibal's (and Will's) character. Things are gonna get a little fucked up.
>
> Thanks for reading!

When Will woke up next, he frowned in confusion: the ceiling was a different colour. He hitched himself up on his elbows and inspected the room: spacious, and harsh with white light. Windowless. He sat up more properly to take in more details but felt his stomach drop as he saw a toilet at the corner of the room. Then, his eyes shifted to the door: heavy and metallic, and probably locked. This was a prison of a sort. Where was this room located in Hannibal's house exactly? In the basement, maybe. But—was it even in Hannibal's house?

Everything was so finely furnished that Will felt sick with the thought of how practiced Hannibal was. He felt cold sweat break out on his skin as he wondered if there had been other hostages Hannibal had kept before him.

Will moved to stand up when a clinking sound caught his attention. He looked down at his ankle to find that it was cuffed. The chain that was attached to it was attached to a thick metal hook on the floor, by the bed.

Will's first instinct was to shout out for Hannibal. And then he realised that Hannibal was the one who had put him there.

So, this was to be his punishment. Even though punishment implied that there was going to be an end to it. This, though, felt indefinite.

Will slumped back against his new bed, ruffling his hair in blind panic. He wondered if Hannibal would leave him to starve; he concluded that maybe that was a better end to his life.

This was his own fault, for trusting a stranger so blindly all those months ago. He should have known, should have been more cautious.

Will fell sideways into the bed, curling up in a foetal position. How had it gone so wrong so fast? He fell asleep again, exhausted with his never-ending questions. Questions that he would never get the answers to.

*

Will jerked awake as he heard the metal door slide open.

Hannibal stood in a simple shirt and slacks, holding a tray. Will felt relieved at the sight of him, and then felt a twist of hate in his gut for feeling so. “Get me out of here,” Will demanded, plain and simple.

Hannibal looked back as if in surprise, as if he hadn’t expected such ferocity from Will. He didn’t answer, but approached cautiously and set the tray on the table which was next to the bed.

“What do you hope to achieve in keeping me like this?” Will asked, standing up. Hannibal was close—close enough to grab, but he kept his hands to himself—he didn’t want to turn violent, because of course, that would be the kind of thing that Hannibal would want to happen.

“Sit down,” Hannibal said, stone-faced. “Let me feed you, and then we will talk,”

“No, Hannibal. Tell me what’s happening,”

“Will.” Hannibal warned. “Sit.”

“Or what?” Will said, surprising himself by putting both his hands onto Hannibal’s chest, and then shoving, hard.

Hannibal stumbled a few steps back, but didn’t fall. But when he looked back at Will, there was a vicious rage barely contained in his eyes.

“You will do as I say,” Hannibal said, suddenly moving so quick that Will found himself shoved down onto the bed. On instinct, he brought his fist and felt it connect against Hannibal’s cheekbone. But then his vision went completely white—and his hearing was lost for a moment. Will opened his eyes for a second to see that Hannibal had used the tray to strike his head. Will felt woozy, and then fell unconscious.

*

Hannibal was still there when Will came to. Will turned his face to find Hannibal sitting on the bed by his side, head bowed; thinking. The meal that he had carried in for Will was still left uncleaned on the floor.

Will was shocked to discover that his hands were handcuffed behind his back. There was a throbbing pain in his left temple, where the tray had hit him—he could feel it caked with dried blood, left untended.

“H-hanni-bal,” Will croaked, prompting Hannibal to look at him. And when Hannibal did, Will found that he was scared. Scared of Hannibal, and what he could do. How far he’d go to keep Will alive and submissive.

There was no love behind those eyes. Instead, Hannibal only stared at Will, wordlessly.

“It wasn’t the right thing to do,” Will confessed. “What I did to Freddie.”

Hannibal sighed. “Is doing the right thing so important to you?”

Will winced, because he could understand Hannibal’s argument.

“And didn’t you feel so very alive?”

“I did feel alive—by being with you. I don’t need to kill. I don’t need it, Hannibal. Not like you."

“You said you felt powerful,” Hannibal said, unmoving.

“Power corrupts,” Will said and looked away, guilty. He wanted to sit up—he tried moving, but it only resulted in more pain in his shoulder. It was stiff, and shooting pain down his whole arm. “Shoulder hurts,” Will said, defeated.

Hannibal stood up and slid his hands under Will’s armpits, hoisting him up.

“What is so bad about corruption?” Hannibal asked, continuing.

Will closed his eyes; suppressed a sigh. The conversation was not going anywhere. “I’m sorry for hitting you,” Will said instead, eyeing at purple Hannibal’s cheekbone. “I didn’t mean it. I just panicked.”

Will flinched when Hannibal suddenly stood up. He seemed to be thinking, as if trying to make up his mind about something.

“Hannibal?” Will asked, cautious.

But Hannibal only turned away and walked out.

“Hannibal?” Will called again, but the door was shut on him.

*

Will waited, wondering how much longer he would have to keep this way. His arms were going numb; the pain in his shoulder was hard to ignore. Hannibal wouldn’t leave him alone like this for days, right?

And then he heard footsteps, followed by the opening of the door. Hannibal didn’t even look at him.

Will wanted to speak but he didn’t know what to say, so he stayed put and watched as Hannibal approached. He had a first-aid kit in his hands—and though Will tried to deny it, he felt his heart melt with gratitude. Hannibal sat down beside him and placed a hand under Will’s chin, inspecting the damage. Will closed his eyes, undeniably feeling calmer as Hannibal brushed away the hair from his temple to clean the wound. Will bore the pain with clenched teeth as Hannibal applied disinfectant. When he was finished, he plastered a large band-aid over it, and then carded his hand through Will’s hair. Will looked up to see Hannibal with sorrowful but affectionate eyes.

“Thank you,” Will whispered.

Hannibal continued, moving his hand down to caress at the side of Will’s face.

“Are you hungry?” he asked.

Will wasn’t; but he didn’t want to ruin the mood. His pain was urgent too, but he kept quiet about it. He nodded.

“Give me a few minutes to prepare you another meal,” Hannibal said.

Will looked down guiltily at the floor, where the food was drying out. He didn’t deserve Hannibal’s food. What he deserved was to bend down and eat it off of the floor.

“I’m sorry…” Will whispered.

*

When Hannibal returned, Will was in obvious discomfort. He couldn’t keep from not twisting his face, but he knew that he couldn’t predict himself if his hands were left uncuffed. Like how earlier, he hadn’t predicted that he’d hit Hannibal in the face.

Hannibal repeated what he’d done earlier: he set the tray down, and stood looking at Will. “Are you going to behave?”

Will faltered, unable to answer. They both knew that the answer was ambiguous. But Will was surprised when Hannibal reached around Will and unlocked the cuffs. Will winced, slowly bringing his hand in front of him. The cuffs had been a little tight; his circulation had been cut off.

Hannibal sat beside him, a vague regretful look in his eyes. “Relax your arms. Let me feed you,”

Will nodded, still rubbing at his wrists. So weak now, that he couldn't bring himself to refuse Hannibal's help in feeding him. “Okay,”

*

For the following days, Will stayed docile: he did as he was told.

It wasn’t like Will had finally come to his senses, but he figured that the image of Hannibal he had in his mind had been—all this time—completely off.

The truth was that Hannibal had just wanted a pet to toy around with.

Self-pity was overtaking him. It had all been his own fault; he concluded. If Hannibal was demented, so was Will. Because he had been the one to slash Freddie’s throat. Maybe he deserved this. Maybe he and Hannibal deserved each other.

For the current moment, he felt content with not knowing why Hannibal was keeping him under confinement. The anger from that day when he had hit Hannibal had worn off: all he wanted now, was to convince Hannibal that he hadn't really been trying to escape.

*

The next time Hannibal came, Will sat up obediently to indicate that nothing untoward was going to happen. He was going to be civil, and ask his questions calmly. His intention wavered slightly as he watched Hannibal approaching with food on a tray. Despite everything, this still meant that Hannibal cared about him. Because the situation could be a lot worse. Hannibal didn't have to bring him food. But he chose to.

"Hello, Will." Hannibal said. He seemed much more composed than the night before. More tired. More…sad.

Will turned around and presented his wrists for cuffing. He was going to be good. He sat down and waited until Hannibal did so too. But when he looked at Hannibal, he felt an ache pierce his heart. The night before Hannibal had seemed so cold and distance. A hard shell that was impossible to crack. Today he seemed withered. Will accepted a bite and chewed uneasily as he tried to figure out what Hannibal was feeling. He wondered if he could outright ask how Hannibal was feeling, but that felt like a dangerous question. But then he looked again at Hannibal's eyes, and realised suddenly that Hannibal was hurting. Hurting because Will had betrayed him by trying to escape.

The food turned to dry mush in his mouth. But he swallowed because Hannibal had made him this meal, and because he wasn't sure when he would be eating next.

Carefully, Will spoke after a sip of water was given to him: "I wasn't—I wasn't trying to escape."

Hannibal just looked back in silence.

"Why would I want to escape from you?" Will urged. Scenes from how happy he had been with Hannibal flitted across his mind, and to think that for Hannibal, it could've all been an act was suddenly suffocating him. "Don't you believe me?" Will asked.

Hannibal's jaw twisted in irritation. He set the food aside and crossed his legs, lacing his fingers together. "I couldn't take any chances. What if you were to put us in danger of being exposed?" He was referring to Freddie's murder. Hannibal thought Will was going to go to the cops and confess.

Will shuddered in disbelief. "I'd never do that," he pleaded. "I was just—" he stopped, suddenly feeling foolish.

Hannibal waited for Will to continue.

Will stuttered. "I just—I don't know—"

Will felt his grip on this conversation sliding away from him. Nothing was going to convince Hannibal now. He sighed. “Are you going to kill me now?”

Hannibal looked up as if the thought had never occurred to him. His jaw twitched, and then he stood up. “Time for your bath, I think.” he said.

*

Will followed obediently, even though it seemed that Hannibal was going to drown him. But he followed because it was the only thing that he could do—and frankly, he didn’t care if he was going to die anymore. If Hannibal wanted him dead, then so be it.

It was hard not to respond to Hannibal’s touch as he was undressed. It was hard not to feel soothed; or to crave for more. He peered into Hannibal’s face, trying to dig out any signs of affection. But Hannibal was having conflicting feelings, as if he was trying not to look too long, lest he be distracted from what he had decided to do, which was to kill Will.

Finally, as Will slid into the tub and rested his head against the edge, he felt a stutter in his chest. He turned into Hannibal’s hand when it came to slide against the side of his face, bringing water to it so that it ran down in drips. A tear escaped and Will had to turn his face away.

“I was really happy—for once in my life, Hannibal.” Will said, through quivering voice.

Hannibal stayed silent for a heavy moment. And then he placed a hand under Will’s chin to turn his face towards him. Will opened his eyes, trying to linger in this calm image of Hannibal before he was going to be plunged into his death.

But there was worry in Hannibal’s face, plain and simple. “I’m not going to kill you, Will.” he admitted.

Will still felt flutters of tears aching to be let out. And, they did. Because he wasn’t sure if Hannibal not killing him was a good thing. But he tried not to think of it. He became overwhelmed with a bursting gratitude for Hannibal, and leaned forward to bring his wet arms around Hannibal's neck in an embrace. He was getting Hannibal all wet, but he didn't care. After a moment, Hannibal too, brought his arms around Will. "I'm sorry," Will said. "Sorry for everything," For letting you down, for trying to escape. For being so worthless, he would've said, if he wasn't sobbing so uncontrollably.

"Shh..." Hannibal said, cradling Will's head and stroking; a gesture that soothed him, because of how sincere it felt.

*

Will complied and was escorted back to his room, with the urgent need not to escape, but to have Hannibal to himself just a little longer. As soon as his ankle was secured in its cuff, Will reached out boldly, trying to…the simple word was to seduce, Hannibal. He pressed his body up against Hannibal and kissed him, hands caressing along Hannibal's body. Hannibal hummed in surprise but didn’t push Will away. Despite the cold demeanour that Hannibal had

exhibited towards Will for the last few days, it was obvious that Will was having an effect on Hannibal. Will heard Hannibal inhale sharply as Will lowered his hand and cupped Hannibal's growing erection. "Please, let me." Will whispered. Please let me please you. Let me thank you for taking care of me, he wanted to say. He could see a struggle taking place in Hannibal's eyes but Will was quick: he undid Hannibal's pants and lowered himself to his knees to take Hannibal's cock in his mouth. He knew it wasn't healthy to be indulging in this sort of depraved behaviour—Will was being held captive, apparently against his will. He wasn't supposed to be feeling like he wanted Hannibal more than ever.

Will felt Hannibal's hands tangle in his curls, strong in their hold, as if this was all too much for Hannibal.

There was the inevitable moment of clarity after Hannibal came: it was as if Hannibal realised how foolish he had been to let Will do this, seeing as there would have been a probability that Will could attack Hannibal when Hannibal was in the throes of pleasure. Hannibal zipped himself up, eyes evading Will. He signed and turned around, walking away.

Just as Hannibal was about to exit, Will called out to him.

Hannibal looked back, as if expecting Will to beg to be freed.

But of course Will wasn't going to do that. Instead, he whimpered and felt himself frown as blobs of tears fell from his eyes. He was so *lonely.* He wanted to be held. And Hannibal knew that. But he regarded Will with cold eyes, the hard line of his mouth an unmoving. And then he slid the door shut.

*

Will wasn't perfectly sure, but he guessed that a week had passed. The anger that he had felt on his first day of confinement came back in full-force. Even if he wanted to stay calm, he couldn't help but let his emotions take over him as Hannibal walked in next.

"Let me out," Will said. "I don't like it here,"

"Will…" Hannibal began.

"I'm not going to leave you," Will pleaded. "Please. I'm going crazy."

"You can't say such things, Will. We both know how unpredictable you can be."

"Why don't you just amputate my feet, then?" Will said, in a fit of rage.

Hannibal remained speechless for a second. "I couldn't possibly do that to you,"

"So you're just gonna keep me locked up until you brainwash me enough so that I'm so loyal to you, the idea of leaving this place vanishes from my mind?"

Hannibal ran a hand through his hair, clearly frustrated. "I am going to step away until you've calmed down,"

“Don’t,” Will said, approaching Hannibal until he felt the chain on his ankle pulled taut.

Hannibal stepped back accordingly, safely out of reach.

“I didn’t meet your expectations. The dog that you worked so hard to train finally bit the hand that feeds, and how do you react? You deny it freedom. You take away his free will. You confine him—just because things didn’t go the way that you wanted to.”

Hannibal just watched, jaw twitching.

“Do you think that with enough conditioning, I will learn to be like you? Can you bend a man so skilfully that he will act as you want? I thought you liked me because I was me. But it seems that you just want someone who wants the same things that you do,”

Silence.

“Why don’t you just kill me, Hannibal?”

Hannibal made a choked sound, as if he was in distress. Sighing, he said: “You know very well, Will. You’re just afraid to admit it.”

“I’m not afraid,” Will retorted. “I’m just—tired!”

“Tired of me?”

Will paused. Hannibal was twisting the conversation into another direction. “No—I’m not tired of you.” he said. “I’m just—tired of what you’ve done to me. What you’re doing to me now.”

Hannibal looked away, guilty.

Will felt himself almost giving in, almost wanting to take back the things that he had said. But he had to stand his ground.

“So what’s the reason, Hannibal? Why don’t you just kill me?”

Hannibal turned his face back to Will. Before Will could do anything, he found Hannibal pushing up against him, his shirt bunched up in Hannibal’s hands.

“Because I love you, Will.”

It was a second before Will could speak. From pure shock, he heard himself laugh nervously. You're just saying that to manipulate me, Will wanted to say. But he said instead: “You love me—but not enough to let me go.”

“I love you so much that I can’t possibly let you go, Will.”

Will fell silent again, as if Hannibal had won.

“I love you, Will.” Hannibal repeated, bringing Will’s attention back to him. Will softened as he felt Hannibal’s hands cup his face. “I love you…” Hannibal whispered again, his eyes so sincere that Will felt tears in his eyes. He was telling the truth. Will clutched back as Hannibal drew him closer in an embrace.

*

The declaration of love had Will ruminating endlessly. Instead of bringing them even closer, it was pulling them apart. It could've been an opportunity to discuss things further.

A few days passed with indifference from Hannibal, his movements mechanical. Will didn’t dare reach out; he knew that Hannibal was avoiding being too near to him. Will longed to discuss whatever was rummaging around in Hannibal’s head; he longed to have someone who he could talk to.

The pang he always felt whenever Hannibal stood up to leave was getting bigger day by day; growing heavier, and more unbearable. Begging Hannibal wasn’t something that was beneath him, but Will decided to leave that for another day. Instead, he opted first to ask nicely, managing to keep his voice from quivering. “Will you stay here until I fall asleep?”

Hannibal gave him a look—a dreadful second passed in which Will hung onto Hannibal’s answer as if with his life. He wondered what he would do if Hannibal refused.

But Hannibal simply nodded. “Go brush your teeth, then,” he said, patting Will on his back.

Once that was out of the way, Will laid down with a pounding heart. He readied himself to ask Hannibal to cuddle him because *God*—he was so touch starved, and so *lonely.* He just wanted to be touched—to be held. To be told that everything was going to be okay. But, as if reading his mind, Hannibal surprised him by providing him exactly what he had been craving. He extended his arm and brought it around Will, so that Will could lay his head on Hannibal’s chest. It brought back memories of how they had used to be.

At first the silence between them was deafening—gone were the times when Will could speak without having to pick apart his words. So Will pulled himself closer and buried his face into Hannibal’s neck, and in return, Hannibal’s grip on his arm tightened. And suddenly, Will couldn’t stop from crying. He let the tears flow, let them flow from him silently; his hand bunched up in Hannibal’s shirt. He shook, unresponsive to Hannibal’s touches. He wished that he could tell Hannibal what was on mind, without being asked about it. He wished he could let Hannibal know—because they were, in a relationship, after all. Weren’t they supposed to have equal rights, as two people in a relationship, in saying what they wanted or didn’t want from each other? But that wasn’t a logical way to think anymore. Nothing was equal in whatever was being done to Will.

Will had to work to rebuild their trust now. He also had discovered—he pretended like it was a discovery, though he had known all along—that Hannibal liked to see him suffer. It was an obvious fact, given that he had committed countless murders, who had no motives, and was a sadist.

But the uglier truth was that Will wanted to suffer for Hannibal.

When Will woke next, he felt an ache pass through his chest as he gazed at the empty space beside him. And then he realised that his heart was pounding, and he was out of breath—the nightmares were returning.

*

“I miss you,” Will whispered. Hannibal had agreed to lay down with him once again.

“I’m right here, Will.”

Will sighed, softy. “You know what I mean,”

“Do I?” Hannibal said, playfully.

Will pushed himself up on his elbows, facing Hannibal. He reached a hand out and traced it along Hannibal’s jaw.

“Kiss me?” Will whispered.

“You only needed to ask,” Hannibal said, smiling. For a second—Will felt ecstatic, as if everything was back to normal. He leaned closer, putting half his bodyweight onto Hannibal’s body. Hannibal kissed him softly, as opposed to Will, who kissed Hannibal ferociously, as if he had something like hunger burning inside of him. He propped his knee up and rubbed, feeling impatient with his hard-on.

Hannibal paused, looking down.

“What?” Will asked, impatient.

Hannibal smiled and looked back at Will again, continuing their kiss.

“I want to feel your skin against mine,” Will requested, humility stripped away. “Please.” He wanted Hannibal to cover him with his body until every surface belonged to him, and him only.

Hannibal kissed him again, moving so that he was on top of Will now; his hands clutched at the waistband of his boxers, dragging them down. Will’s hands hurried to all of the openings of Hannibal’s clothing, swift with undoing. Once they were completely naked, he pulled Hannibal close so that they were chest to chest. Will spread his legs, and a thrill ran through him when he felt Hannibal’s erection against his own.

Hannibal held Will’s head delicately in place with his hands, locking their mouths together again. Will reached both hands down between them, taking hold of their cocks together. Hannibal let out a sigh when Will squeezed. He buried his face into Will’s neck as Will slathered their pre-come and stroked them together.

“I love you,” Will whispered, prompting Hannibal to smother him with kisses again. His breathing was growing frantic.

“Say it again,” Hannibal said, voice strained, body rocking into Will’s hold.

“I love you,” Will gasped, growing dangerously close.

Hannibal’s mouth was on him again, and this time, he said it into Hannibal’s mouth. “I love you,”

“I love you,” Hannibal said too, a final groan escaping from his mouth.

# Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Will has conflicting feelings about his confinement, but feels that his relationship with Hannibal is somewhat healing, as they explore the sexual side of their relationship.

What Will felt for Hannibal now, shifted back and forth between love and hate—it really depended on how optimistic Will was feeling, depending on the moment. One minute he'd find himself unable to think straight—blind with fury and resentment.

Another minute he'd find that life underground wasn't bad after all. Hadn't he, once, told Hannibal himself, that he didn't want to ever go outside? That all he needed and wanted, was here, at his fingertips?

And didn't Hannibal always treat him with utter kindness? He brought him food, he shaved him, bathed him. Brought him clothes, and books—even kept him sexually gratified. Wasn't this all that he had ever wanted in his life?

To have someone who loved him, and took take care of him?

He'd find his thoughts always drifting to Hannibal—bordering on the obsessive, instead of worrying about the situation that he had found himself in.

And in spite of all the love that Hannibal was generous enough to dole out, Will wanted to keep what little that he had left of himself. He wanted to hold onto whatever free will that he had—if he had any. The part of himself that didn't act according to Hannibal. Fighting—for what exactly, he didn't know—but fighting all the same.

One night Will went to sleep in a bitter mood, and woke up with a jolt—breathless and frightened by a nightmare. When he had finally been able to shift back into reality, it was only then that he'd realised that it was thanks to Hannibal's arms around him, cradling him—shushing him and pressing kisses to his temple, that he wasn't up pacing back and forth, unable to shake the nightmare off. No, I don't want your comfort, Will had wanted to say. Let my nightmares be my own battles to fight.

But Hannibal stroked his hair, kept whispering that he was going to be alright. He did it until Will felt his breath return to normal, and his frown disappear. He was thinking clearer now, and left craving for more kisses and attention.

But Hannibal knew when to withdraw; knew exactly how much to give to leave Will wanting for more. Will felt something like resentment build up in his gut again—had it all been a tactic to leave Will feeling so helpless, and dependant on Hannibal?

The one thing that could work, that could bring Hannibal's arms back around him would be to simply ask for it. Hannibal liked it when Will had to ask for his tenderness.

Because if he asked for it—if he spoke it into existence, then it would only prove further how much Will needed Hannibal. And that Hannibal had full power over him.

*

It was when Will was in one of his better moods when the thought came to him. He had been thinking about it since ages ago, and the moment to mention it seemed ripe: "I think I'm ready for something more," Will said. He didn't quite know how to say it, but he hoped that Hannibal would catch his drift. He felt selfish, and demanding. What if Hannibal was happy with things just as they were?

Hannibal looked at him, trying to read his face. "Are you referring to penetrative sex?" he asked, calmly.

Will felt his cheeks redden, and gulped with nervousness. "Yeah," And then he asked, boldly: "Don't you ever think about doing it with me?"

Hannibal huffed, rubbing Will's hands in his. "You're mocking me, Will."

"No, I'm not."

"Then, yes. I've thought about it often." he said. And then: "Tell me, Will. Who would be on the receiving end?"

Will blinked, reddening. It was obvious—but Hannibal liked to dwell on the details. He liked it when Will was forced to speak about things that he wasn't too comfortable to. "I'd be," he replied.

Hannibal hummed, satisfied. "There is preparation to be done before we can do it properly,"

Will nodded.

"It will be painful, at first."

Will nodded. Pain was good.

*

Despite Will's obviously dire situation, he found that he was looking forward to finally having sex the 'proper' way with Hannibal. He didn't know what it would feel like, but the thought didn't stop him from touching himself. He imagined that his submission to Hannibal would be complete once they'd pass this barrier; he hoped that he would see more of what the true Hannibal looked like when he'd be able to exercise his dominance over Will like this.

The preparations leading up to the act wasn't pretty, or comfortable. But Hannibal was attentive and careful not to hurt Will too much. It took days until Will could feel some sort of a progress; it was impressive how patient Hannibal was, and how impatient Will found

himself to be. In instances such as these, when Hannibal was so careful with him, Will could clearly see how much he meant to Hannibal. He hoped that he hadn't deluded himself into thinking so.

Finally the day came when it was to happen. Will waited for Hannibal, prepped with an anal-plug all day. Surprisingly (or not), he found that he was excited to have the plug in him; it ran a thrill up his spine to think about why it was in him, and what was to come after his long wait.

Will sat up as he watched Hannibal enter. “Hey,” he said, smiling.

“Hello, Will.” Hannibal smiled. He locked the door, but didn’t bother with cuffing Will’s wrists. He wasted no time and kissed Will as if his patience had worn out.

“Hectic day?” Will asked, laughing, and curious.

Hannibal sighed, looking at Will as if he was going to devour him. “I have been thinking about you all day,” he admitted.

Will smiled, feeling himself blush. He loved the way Hannibal held him so close by the waist; how he looked at Will as if he was in love. Will held up a hand and ran it through Hannibal’s hair, watching closely as Hannibal dropped his guard, closed his eyes and leaned into Will’s touch. The moment was almost perfect, except for the cold metal that was locked around Will’s ankle. But Will pushed the thought aside for now. “I’ve prepared myself as you told me to,” he said.

Hannibal smiled. “Good boy,” he said, running his hands down to grab at Will's ass.

Will felt excitement spike in him hearing those words. He wanted to be good for Hannibal. He reached his hands to Hannibal’s throat and undid his tie boldly, without permission. Hannibal let it happen up until his shirt was unbuttoned, as if impatient to see Will naked. He sat Will down and removed his shirt; and then paused at the realisation that the cuff had to come off if Will wanted to take his boxers off.

Hannibal regarded Will—and Will never knew what made him decide on it when Hannibal unlocked the cuff and set it aside to take Will’s boxers down. Hannibal resumed touching Will, running his hands flat on Will’s thighs. Will twitched anxiously, not trusting himself without the cuff on his ankle. He kissed Hannibal back when Hannibal rose, but his mind was still on that cuff lying on the floor. He wouldn't be able to perform, with the chance of escape dangling right in front of his eyes. “Hannibal?” he asked.

Hannibal merely grunted an answer; Will could feel his erection pressed against his thigh.

“Put the cuff back on?”

Hannibal pulled away, searching Will’s face. Just as it seemed that Will had ruined the moment, Hannibal leaned down and secured the cuff around Will’s ankle. “Thank you,” Will whispered. He laid down and watched as Hannibal rid himself of his shoes and trousers; and then fishing out a bottle of lube from his clothes that were discarded on the floor.

Will felt his heart rate spike. So, this really was about to happen. He could feel himself getting nervous.

Hannibal fished out something else: a condom, which he handed to Will, as if the decision was his.

Will thought for maybe too long. He decided to be honest. “Don’t want you to use it,” he said, a little timidly. “I mean, if you want to, then that’s okay too.”

Hannibal took it away from him and dropped it onto the floor, moving to lay on top of Will.

Hannibal buried his face into Will’s neck, grunting as if with pleasure. Did Hannibal like him that much? Will wondered. Yes, he did. But not enough to set him free. “You smell divine,” Hannibal said, moving his face down to the centre of Will’s chest, trailing kisses down until he was burying his face into Will’s groin. “Oh, Will…” Hannibal sighed. He ran his lips up and down Will’s cock, making Will writhe with pleasure and nervousness. He had always been conscious about how he looked when he was experiencing pleasure during sex. He clamped his mouth shut when Hannibal took his cock into his mouth. It had been weeks since Hannibal had done this for him—it was almost unbearable. “H-Hannibal, wait—” he warned, making him look up.

“What is the matter?” Hannibal asked. Will couldn’t tell if he was being teased.

“Too much…” he reasoned.

Hannibal smirked. “Let us do something else, then,” he said, reaching a hand under Will’s balls and tugging at the plug.

Will nodded, heart hammering.

“You’ve been so obedient, Will.” Hannibal said, finally taking it all out. He seemed satisfied.

Hannibal smiled, coating one finger with lube, and then pushing it into Will. Will jolted a little. “Oh God,” he said.

“Will, you must tell me if it becomes too much,” Hannibal said. “I don’t want to cause you any damage.”

“Keep going, please.” Will replied. “I want to feel you inside me,”

The words had their intended effect on Hannibal. He pushed apart Will’s knees further, making a place for himself. Will could feel a mixture of fear and excitement dancing in his gut. Hannibal lubed himself and Will thoroughly; and when Hannibal pushed into Will, he couldn’t keep from pinching his eyes shut in discomfort. He felt his hands making a fist out of themselves. Hannibal lifted them to his lips, kissing them, keeping his body still until Will could breathe a little. Presently, Will nodded for Hannibal to push in more, and they repeated this pattern until Hannibal was all the way inside Will.

Will opened his eyes, looking up at Hannibal. The eye contact was proving to be too much. “Kiss me?” Will asked.

Hannibal complied. He lowered his mouth onto Will's, slowly moving his hips so that when he thrusted harder, Will's cries were swallowed up into Hannibal's mouth.

"I want to hear you," Hannibal demanded, pulling away.

Will was about to answer—as if there could be a suitable argument to be made—when he cried out hard, feeling Hannibal invade him deeper. "Ah—"

Hannibal's breaths were becoming frantic. Will liked to see him like this. The usual iron-grip he had over the situation was being eased away; as if he was almost out of control.

"Would you stop? If I asked you to?" Will asked, taking a lot of effort to keep himself coherent.

Hannibal thrusted harder. "Would you want me to?" he asked, between heavy breaths.

Will was confused himself. He had, up until this point, given up every decision regarding himself to Hannibal. It was only felt right if Hannibal did what he wanted, even in this.

"No," Will said. "I want you to do to me whatever you want,"

Hannibal slowed down a little, eyes fixed on Will's.

"I was indebted to you when you saved me. I'm yours to do as you please," he said. "To take as you please."

Hannibal took Will's face into his hands and kissed him hard and without control. They jolted together as Hannibal pushed in harder; until Will was crying out, and Hannibal was grunting into his mouth. Hannibal did as he pleased: he pulled out and came over Will's belly. Will had been expecting—hoping—that Hannibal would come inside him; he wanted to feel what it was like to have some part of Hannibal inside of him.

"I want to see you touch yourself," Hannibal said, sitting up.

What Hannibal meant was that there really was no need to be shy anymore, now that they had revealed themselves to one another. They had killed together. And Will had received Hannibal inside of him, let him into his most private part. There were no pretences anymore.

"You will let me look," Hannibal said—demanded, settling back on his hands.

Will reached out a shaky hand and ran it through the come on his belly, lubricating his fingers. He wasn't particularly feeling confident or comfortable about this.

"Touch yourself as you do when you think I'm not around," Hannibal said, smirking—eyes challenging.

Will felt himself redden. He tried to think where could there possibly be a hidden camera. "You've been watching me?"

"Yes," Hannibal said, as if it was the most obvious answer ever.

Will admitted to himself that there was a certain thrill to being watched—there was no time to get angry at Hannibal now. He took his dick in his hand and started stroking, keeping his eyes on Hannibal. He laid back into the propped-up pillow and spread his knees, feeling sinful, as if he was not supposed to do this in front of anyone. Hannibal made a pleased sound, his eyes hungry for this image of Will taking his own pleasure. Will brought his other hand into Hannibal's pool of come and stroked himself with both hands, breath growing rugged. He let his eyes glide down Hannibal's naked figure, feasting like he had never dared to do before. He imagined Hannibal's strong hands clasped around his throat, and—Will exhaled hard. "I'm gonna come—" he cried. Hannibal swiftly crouched down, surprising Will. Before Will could say anything, Hannibal had taken Will's cock into one hand and directed his spill into his mouth.

You didn't have to, Will almost said. But then if Hannibal hadn't wanted to, he wouldn't have. He stared in awe at Hannibal, trying to catch his breath. After a moment, he asked: "Have I managed please you?"

"Tremendously," Hannibal smiled, eyes hazy and content.

*

It was hard not to feel the room full of tension the next day when Hannibal showed up to feed him. Will had been thinking all night long about what they had done—how much he had liked laying under Hannibal; and how his mind had of its own accord, chased his thoughts into turning into something violent. Yes, Will had to admit it to himself: the idea of Hannibal choking him was something that he wanted to feel, desperately. He didn't ask for it yet: he pretended that Hannibal would be repulsed by such a suggestion. That they were normal people in a normal relationship.

"What's on your mind?" Hannibal prompted, reaching out and brushing away the curls obscuring Will's eyes.

Will shook his head. It was always impossible to escape from Hannibal. He took a sip of water and handed the finished tray back to Hannibal. "Thank you, this was delicious."

Hannibal merely smiled, receiving the tray back. He laid his hand on Will's forearm, moving it away from his lap. "Thinking about yesterday, Will?" Hannibal said, a smirk on his face.

"Uh-huh," Will murmured, taking back his arm and covering his half-hard erection again.

"Need a hand?"

Will smiled, despite everything. "Wouldn't wanna take up your time," he said, half-joking.

Hannibal set the tray on the table, and then moved closer to Will. "Tell me, what were you thinking about just now."

Will gulped. He watched as Hannibal slid his hand over the waistband of his pants.

"I—"

Hannibal's hand went downwards, tracing a finger over the hard shape of Will's erection. It was torturous. "Tell me," Hannibal whispered, drawing close and running his lips along Will's ear.

Will shivered. He brought his hand over Hannibal's and guided it to press harder, but Hannibal snatched his hand away. "No, tell me first."

"I—I was imagining your hands around my throat," he admitted, eyes down. He turned his face to Hannibal, who was pleased. More than pleased. Will allowed himself to be kissed, recognising that Hannibal accepted whatever sick thoughts that he had, and felt grateful for it.

"I'm so happy you told me, Will." Hannibal said in a thick voice, laced with desire. He slipped his hand into Will's pants and squeezed, running a thumb over the wet tip. Will sighed with relief. A distant thought urged that this had been Hannibal's plan all along. Hannibal had dug out the violent parts of Will.

"Ask me to do it," Hannibal said, voice sweet and coercive.

"Please—I want your hands around my throat," Will said, dizzy already. "I want you to choke me,"

Will was pushed back onto the bed. Hannibal pulled his pants down to bunch around his thighs, and then kneeled on the bed, approaching Will. Finally, Hannibal settled himself by straddling Will. Will watched with anticipation boiling in his blood. He gasped when he felt both of Hannibal's hands wrap around his neck—no pressure, but snug so that he couldn't move. Hannibal kissed him, violently; ravenously. When he drew back, he applied a little pressure. "Touch yourself, Will." he commanded.

Will nodded and reached down, taking hold of himself. He began stroking as Hannibal kissed him again, adding a little pressure to the hold. Will knew how long it took to choke someone to death. And he also knew that Hannibal was completely capable of choking Will to death. But he wouldn't—would he? His breath hitched as Hannibal began applying more pressure. Will kept on touching himself, almost close to climax now. He realised that maybe it would've been wise to discuss a safe word.

"How this excites you," Hannibal mused. "It excites me too."

"F-fuck—" Will clenched his eyes shut.

"Do you like that your life is entirely in my hands? To do as I please?"

"Y-yes,"

"Do you know that you are mine?" Hannibal asked.

Will was on the verge of passing out. He saw stars in his vision.

"Do you know that you are completely mine?"

"Yes!" Will cried out, and felt his body jolt—and then warmth spilled over his hands. He felt Hannibal loosen his hold and move his hands to caress away his curls instead, soothing. After a while, Hannibal moved away, admiring the work that he had done.

Will was spent. He slumped back, arms lifeless. He was annihilated. He took a few breaths and lifted his head up. He didn't want to be rude. "Thank you, Hannibal."

Hannibal was sitting up straight, watching. He placed a hand on one of Will's shins. "You surpass my idea of you everyday," he said, satisfied. "What a true honour to have come across you."

Will saw a hunter hunched over a trapped animal; he saw that animal being shoved into a cage. He sat up, not wanting to talk or think of such things. He drew closer to Hannibal, reaching out a hand, to return the favor. "Let me," he said.

Hannibal took his hand, and held it instead. "I appreciate it, Will, but watching you has been enough for me."

Will paused. Was this a tactic of some sort? "Are you…denying me?"

Hannibal smiled, shaking his head. "I would like to propose a bath," Hannibal said.

"Together?" Will asked, hopeful.

"Together, yes."

*

Hannibal washed Will's hair and body, occasionally planting a kiss onto Will's cheek or shoulder. Will caught himself smiling, blissed out; his limbs deliciously aching. He was about to ask Hannibal if he could wash him too, but stopped, looking down at the handcuffs glinting on his wrists. He had started forgetting they were even there.

After the washing was done, Will settled back against Hannibal's chest as they soaked in the warm water.

Hannibal trailed his fingers on Will's skin, stopping to grip his neck lightly. "You're going to bruise," he said.

"I don't mind. I want it to." Will admitted. "It's from you,"

Hannibal made a pleased sound.

"Your mark on me." Will said. He wondered what else he could endure from Hannibal; how much more there was to be done to him. The possibilities were endless, now that Will had opened this particular door. He wouldn't be able to resist to ask for more, he knew that.

And there was the possibility that they were going to be able to trust each other more this way; to heal. But just as well, there was also the possibility that Will would give too much power to Hannibal, and he would be trapped in his room for as long as Hannibal saw fit.

“Do you think we should settle on a safe word?” Hannibal asked.

Will was slightly taken aback. He knew that the sex that they were going to have from now onwards was almost always going to be violent, but it hadn’t occurred to him that Hannibal thought it possible in himself that he could maybe end up hurting Will.

Do you care about me that much? Will almost asked. “I-I don’t know…”

“I don’t want to hurt you,” Hannibal said,

Beyond what you’ve already done to me? Will wanted to say. “I don’t think you’re gonna hurt me…I mean, I want it, right? I consented.”

“You’re precious to me, Will.” Hannibal said, tenderly.

Will felt an ache pass through his chest. He couldn’t keep from sighing shakily. “Do I mean that much to you?” he asked, wanting to be reassured. “Not that I think that you don’t care about me—” he shrugged. “I just get insecure,”

Hannibal shifted and kissed Will's nape. “You’re my world, Will.”

For once, Will was able to believe Hannibal—whole-heartedly.

*

Hannibal mentioning a safe word was like him giving Will permission to ask for more things to be done to him. Hannibal was fucking him again—it had started becoming more of a regular thing between them. The second, nor the third time had been pleasant—yet, it wasn’t pleasure that Will was seeking. What mattered to him was that he wanted to please Hannibal. He hadn’t anticipated just how much he had come to enjoy the feeling of Hannibal using him.

“I want you to hurt me,” Will begged. “I want to be punished.”

“Haven’t you had enough of pain?” Hannibal asked, toying. But Will could see that the idea appealed to him.

“I want pain, if it’s from you.”

“Why?”

“Feels good, like I deserve it.” Will said. “Is there something wrong with me?”

“Does it feel familiar to you?” Hannibal asked, tracing a finger along Will’s jaw.

“It’s what I associate with…love.”

“You don’t know what you’re asking for,” Hannibal replied, though there was a spark in his eye.

“Please,” Will begged, doe-eyed. “I want you to be more rough. More demanding.”

“Are you sure?”

“I want you to do whatever you want with me. Regardless of whether I like it or not,” Will wanted to feel the blinding sting that came with pain. The helplessness that he would have no control over. It was the rush that he was after; the powerlessness, and the one second where he could think of nothing else but the pain—where he could forget where he was, and who he was.

There was a dark look in Hannibal’s face, that rendered him unrecognisable for a split-second.

It was a moment before Will realised that Hannibal had spun him around—he felt handcuffs click behind his wrists, and then Hannibal penetrated him again, sudden and rough. “Fuck,” Will gasped, more from shock and discomfort, than pleasure.

“Language,” Hannibal said, clasping a palm onto Will’s mouth, restricting his breathing. “Or else you don’t get to come tonight.”

“Yes, sir.” Will heard himself answer against Hannibal’s palm—he didn’t know where that word had come from.

Hannibal hummed pleasantly, supporting Will by bringing his other arm around Will's middle. And then he began thrusting, more aggressive and uncaring of Will than usual. Will wobbled on his knees, drunk with not being able to breathe—drunk with the obscene sound of Hannibal’s body slapping against his own.

And then Will found himself thrown down flat onto the bed, face thrusted down hard into the pillow. He couldn’t breathe—but he felt Hannibal penetrate him again, smother his body. Hannibal thrusted until his needs were met—he fucked Will as if he were nothing but a hole. And when Hannibal finally turned Will around, he was pleased to see that Will had come just by being used alone.

“Thank you,” Will whispered, breathless and ready to pass out.

*

“What did it feel like? Watching me take a life,” Will asked one day, curious. He hoped to seek closure by asking these questions. The upside to exploring sex was that it was bringing the two of them closer together, and therefore it helped Will communicate better. It was becoming easier to talk of such things as murder—though he wondered if that was a good thing. “Did it feel exciting, like your first kill?” he asked.

“In a way, yes,” Hannibal replied, honest. “I felt that feeling return when I watched you kill.”

Will was slightly taken aback. Of course, it was obvious that Hannibal had liked Will’s surrender to cold-blooded murder. But to hear him compare it to his first killing was…an honour. Will had been allowed this honour.

And in that moment, it was undeniable, the bond that they had.

Will understood then, that it was possible to live vicariously, to be happy, to feel life gushing and pulsing, simply by looking at the person that you loved. To feel life run through you, and excite you anew. And maybe it was the truest and most profound thing, that you could do this with the person you loved.

To feel elated, when they thrived.

To love was to ignore morals; to embrace the madness. Like cherishing a rose, along with its spiky thorns. He had to admit that no matter what Hannibal did, or was going to do to him, he would always do as Hannibal pleased. Because to love was also to ignore the worst in Hannibal, in order to enjoy the best in him.

# Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Will makes a bargain with Hannibal.

And despite the intoxicating feeling—the escape that sex had provided him with, it really just meant that it was a distraction against the plain truth that Will was being held captive. It had been a distraction—almost a way to explore himself, and his sexuality. The rush of discovering new things was beginning to fade away—and Will found himself questioning why. Why was he still imprisoned, good for nothing, except for Hannibal's pleasure. Of course he wanted to please Hannibal—but that wasn't the point. The point—or, the question was—how much longer was he going to be kept like this?

He concluded—no, knew that asking why wouldn't get him anywhere. So he decided to ask for something more reasonable: a walk outside. A chance to breathe fresh air.

He couldn't exactly guess how much time had passed. He could ask Hannibal, he realised, but he gathered that it thrilled Hannibal that Will's sense of time had become so warped—and that Hannibal was the only one who had the means to set it right. He could also imagine Hannibal spinning the question around and asking him why he needed to know; what use could it be for him, to know the time and date.

However much time had passed, it felt like a lot. Maybe a month and a half. Maybe two. Frankly, Will couldn't imagine going another month like this. Suddenly and with a sadness that cracked his heart, he imagined running through the woods with his dogs, not a care in the world. He missed them badly, and felt pathetic when tears escaped from his eyes.

He would never get his dogs back—but he longed to be in nature. Under the sun.

He summoned the courage—built it up for two nights until he flat out pleaded to Hannibal. "I need to be let out," he said, as if he were a dog. "Just a walk, please. I'll do anything."

Hannibal looked back at him, silent.

"The sun'll do me good," he said, out of sheer desperation.

"You do realise the risk I would be taking,"

Will grasped Hannibal's hands. "Please—don't you trust me?"

Hannibal stared down at their joining hands, an internal conflict playing out in his eyes. He squeezed back, considering the request. "I want to,"

“I want you to trust me,” Will said. “Let me prove it to you that you can trust me,”

When Hannibal didn’t reply, Will pleaded again: “Just…give it a think. I’ll do anything that needs to be done.”

Hannibal’s eyes finally lifted to Will’s—and Will felt himself smile, hoping to show how sincere he was. And Hannibal smiled back, as if some plan was being set into motion.

*

Will waited on Hannibal’s decision with a subdued frenzy, one which he could barely hide. He hoped that Hannibal would allow him just this one thing—but he also knew that things that sounded too good to be true came with a price. There would have to be some sort of an exchange. He’d have to give something in order to receive—though frankly, he wasn’t sure if he really had anything left to give anymore.

The subject wasn’t brought up for what felt like days on end—an excruciating wait, and miserable, because Hannibal wasn’t one to let things slip from his mind. But it hovered around them, unspoken and heavy. He could tell that Hannibal was having his fun, and he hated him for that. Will felt like a plaything now more so than ever—resentment was starting to seep into his mind, darkening his thoughts.

And then just like that, Hannibal announced that Will *was* going to be allowed his time outside. Will held his breath, waiting for the catch.

“On one condition,” Hannibal said, watching Will closely.

Will nodded for Hannibal to continue, like the obedient thing that he was. He’d do anything, he had promised Hannibal that.

“You will have dinner with me,” Hannibal said, pausing.

Will nodded suspiciously, confused. That sounded wonderful.

“And with an old acquaintance of mine, who is visiting Baltimore.”

Will nodded in agreement. He could clearly see himself, tight-lipped but jittery, trying to act normal.

“You know what will happen if you misbehave,” Hannibal said. “or speak out of turn.”

Hannibal would kill the guest, whoever he was. And that would plague Will’s conscience.

“You can count on me,” Will replied. He wanted to be good for Hannibal. All he had to do was focus on the reward.

Hannibal smiled and brought a caressing hand to Will’s face. “Excellent.” he said. “You will have your walk the next morning.”

Will smiled, triumphant. “Thank you,” he replied.

*

Hannibal came to him in an impeccable suit of charcoal and red, looking impossibly handsome. The bones that constructed and held his face looked like they had been crafted, like sculpture—and that was the extent to which Will could describe the angular beauty of Hannibal's face. He would never be able to come up with any justifying words.

"Ready?" Hannibal asked, as if Will had the choice to say no.

"Ready." Will replied, presenting his wrists for cuffing.

Hannibal smiled at his obedience, and shook his head to indicate that cuffing wasn't necessary. He was pleased, and he let Will know that it pleased him by handling him with gentle and lingering hands. It was something that Will had come to crave no matter how much he seemed to loathe Hannibal depending on his mood.

The first steps that he took outside of his room were uncertain. Understandably so, Will hoped. He really had been locked away in the basement, like a dirty secret. His eyes darted of their own accord to the various instruments placed in the dark, glinting sinisterly—equipments meant for butchering. For torturing.

For the first time, Will felt genuine fear. Of course, Hannibal did scare him, sometimes. But what he felt now was genuine fear. What if he wasn't that different from all the people that Hannibal had killed? What if everything that he had believed about Hannibal had been a lie? Was he going to be butchered like the rest of them?

The intensity of reality hit him hard in the face, and for a moment, he was unable to walk from it. He took a few breaths hunched over, shaking tremendously while Hannibal supported him with an arm around his waist. He had to stay focused—Will reminded himself. He had to have his walk. He had to find a way to escape.

He straightened and averted his gaze from his surroundings, until he found the foot of the stairs under his feet. Hannibal was by his side all the way, as if he too, was adamant on keeping Will focused on the task at hand. Which was to get him dressed for the performance that the both of them were going to give. Will was to don on a person suit, just as Hannibal had.

It felt like a miracle that he had ascended the basement stairs and finally made his way to their old bedroom. Hannibal opened the door and pushed him in gently, following his slow steps like a deadly shadow.

In all honesty, he was surprised that Hannibal still slept in this room. He'd expected everything to be as they had been, before he had darkened this house. He stopped before their old shared bed—he missed it, desperately, and for a split second, wanted to throw himself into the sheets and never get up. He felt a tremor threatening to spring out of his throat, and tears readying to spill. But Hannibal was there again, circling his arms around Will from behind, setting his chin onto Will's shoulder. The fear that he had felt only minutes ago seemed to vanish—Will lifted his own hands and placed them on where Hannibal's were,

clasped on his stomach. He wanted to stay in this warmth forever—or even just a little longer. He closed his eyes and hummed, hoping Hannibal would allow him just this one little thing.

“Will?” Hannibal asked, after a moment. “Are you feeling up to it?”

Will nodded, and then let himself be slowly turned around. He watched patiently as Hannibal undressed him—first pulling his sweatshirt over his head, and then his pants. He stood naked in front of Hannibal—something that still hadn’t lost its novelty.

Hannibal walked to the closet and pulled out a suit, and came to stand before Will, running his eyes over Will’s body. He tilted his head, a hint of a smile playing at his lips. “You are beautiful,” Hannibal said.

Will smiled and looked away in shyness. When he looked back at Hannibal, he was standing close—so Will leaned forward and kissed him on the lips. Hannibal received the kiss with such gusto that Will had to pull away because he was beginning to feel stabs of arousal in his groin. “Sorry,” he murmured, smiling. How he could he love someone who was capable of things that struck fear in him?

Hannibal smiled back, and then took a moment to compose himself, before returning to what was required to be done.

The suit was dark grey. It felt like a fitting colour for Will.

*

Hannibal ditched the tie that he had laid out for Will, and undid the first two buttons of his white shirt, taking a step back, and nodding. He then sat him down and combed his hair back, leaving only a few curls to frame his forehead.

Will watched as he walked to the closet to open it, revealing the full length mirror it held. "What do you think?" he asked, encouraging Will to stand up and look.

He stood up, a little unsure. He had never liked how he looked, and had gotten used to not seeing himself because he didn't have a mirror in the basement. But he was curious what Hannibal saw. He wanted to see if he could see what Hannibal saw. The man who stared back at him from the mirror looked like a newer version of himself—no, he was someone else. He wasn't entirely unpleasant to look at, but Will still couldn't see why Hannibal called him beautiful.

His eyes darted to Hannibal’s in the mirror, who had silently come to stand behind him. They made a handsome couple, Will thought—oddly.

“Ready, my love?” Hannibal asked, placing both hands on Will’s shoulder and smiling at him in the mirror.

It was the first time that Hannibal had called him that, and it was working. It made him smile. “Yes.” he replied.

*

Will took a deep breath, keeping close to Hannibal so that Hannibal could keep an eye on him. They approached the front door, Will a few steps behind. Hannibal gave him a last look, and then turned to twist the doorknob open.

“Hannibal!” The man was well-dressed, as you’d expect Hannibal’s friends to be—though Hannibal didn’t really have friends, did he? Everyone around him were mere pawns in his game. Tonight Hannibal would watch as Will was pitted against the guest.

Hannibal greeted his guest back, and then received a bouquet of flowers, along with a bottle of red wine. Will wondered if there were romantic connotations behind the gifts. He seemed about a decade older than Hannibal—it was entirely plausible. And then Will wondered if Hannibal had chosen this guest to remind Will that there were other people who wanted Hannibal. That he was not the only one.

“And Robert,” Hannibal said. “This is Will,”

Will stepped forward as Hannibal extended his hand towards his direction. “Hello,” Will said meekly, fearing that his handshake might be too weak.

“Oh,” said the man. “Quite a surprise you have presented me with,”

Hannibal smiled sheepishly—and was that a blush on his cheeks?

“Robert Blanc,” the man introduced himself, smiling. Strangely, Will didn’t feel any threat from the man.

“A pleasure to meet you,” Will said, playing the part. He watched as Mr. Blanc took him in. Hannibal hadn’t offered much information regarding their guest—just the bare minimum. Or, as much as Will could handle. A tailor who had retired after his wife’s death, who did work for only a select few now. The rest of his time went into training novices. He was here now, visiting old clients in the States from France.

“Let us dine,” Hannibal said, handing Will the flowers and the wine, while he turned to remove Mr. Blanc’s jacket.

*

Once they were seated, Will found that he was anxious to return to his room more than ever. It wasn’t that he disliked the guest. He was just afraid that he might say something wrong; something not to Hannibal’s liking.

Hannibal had placed an astounding slab of pork loin on the table, and was undoing the twines. Pork—Will almost chuckled out loud. “A warm meal for chilled bones,” Hannibal said, throwing a look at Mr. Blanc, who looked like he wasn’t so used to the cold.

“Smells wonderful,” the guest said, closing his eyes and breathing in.

Will had to agree.

“Braised with mushrooms and onions at a low temperature for an hour—” Hannibal said, laying a carved slice onto the guest’s plate. “Should be perfectly succulent.”

“Always so drastic,” Mr. Blanc beamed.

“Was he always like this?” Will managed, instantly raising his wine glass to his mouth.

“Oh—yes! He hasn’t seemed to mellow out like the rest of humanity who are approaching middle age,” he said, good-naturedly.

“I might withdraw my hands from everything else—but not this,” Hannibal was smiling. “This is my passion.”

This nonchalant side of Hannibal was confusing—it made Will feel things in his stomach. Unbearable adoration, and yet—fright at how secure the mask was on Hannibal’s face. How good he was at pretending, at blending in.

Finally, Hannibal was seated, and they took to their meals.

“Mmm—I can always count on you to never miss,” Mr. Blanc said. “Speaking of passion,” he said, after swallowing a bite. “How did you two meet?” he asked, lifting his wine glass and twirling it.

Will laughed, nervously. He was more than happy to have Hannibal do the talking. But Hannibal looked at him, expectantly.

“Uh—he saved my life,” he said, and then looked up to Hannibal, who gave him a warm smile. In that moment, it almost seemed like it had all been worth it.

“He was your patient?” The guest inquired, giddy at the notion of something scandalous.

“No—I mean, I was hit by a car, and he—Hannibal was there. We were strangers.”

“Fascinating,” Mr. Blanc said. “A chance encounter.”

“Indeed,”

“It was fate!” Mr. Blanc said. “How romantic and prophetic,”

Fate? Had Will been always fated to—to be held in a basement, against his will?

“Love does truly exist, it seems.” Hannibal said. It was quite a shock to hear it, so Will smiled and stared into his wine glass—and drank deeply.

“It does—ah, only if I had my Anna here with me today,” Mr. Blanc said, voice grown deeper with sadness. “We should always aim to cherish those we love, lest they be taken from us in the blink of an eye.”

Will set his cutlery down. “I’m sorry for your loss,”

Mr. Blanc waved his fork in the air. “Ah—nothing to be done about it. Now, let us not sour this delicious meal with gloomy talk. Will—are you visiting family for Christmas?”

“Oh—” Will chuckled, speechless for a second. Christmas was approaching? It had completely slipped from his mind. He smiled, a little awkward—and then reached his hand out to place onto Hannibal’s. “We have each other,” he replied.

The smile that Hannibal gave him then was so tinged with longing and warmth that Will could’ve wept if he had stared too long. He distracted himself by wondering yet again if Hannibal really was capable of killing Mr. Blanc without a second thought if Will were to act out. And yes. The answer was yes.

“Wonderful,” Mr. Blanc beamed, taking another bite.

*

For dessert there was chocolate mousse and wine-coloured jelly layered beautifully in a crystal-clear glass container, topped with grapes still on the stem, and raspberries. Hannibal sprinkled crushed hazelnuts as a finishing touch and smiled as Mr. Blanc and Will watched in awe.

“You are a lucky man,” Mr. Blanc said, lifting his eyes onto Will.

Despite everything, Will had to smile. He could even feel himself blushing. “That, I am.” he replied.

“I am the more luckier man,” Hannibal said, mood light. “He keeps me young.” he joked.

“Always so modest,” Mr. Blanc said, dipping a golden spoon carefully into the mousse. “You could do anything you put your mind into—expertly, and still you would count yourself among the beginners.”

“One is always learning,” Hannibal said. “How is it?”

“It’s offensive how good it tastes,” beamed the guest. “Right, Will?”

“Absolutely,” Will smiled, looking at Hannibal.

With somewhat of a jolt, Will realised that what he felt for Hannibal in that very moment was pride. He watched him conversing with his guest, looking perfectly composed, despite having had spent hours in the kitchen; not to mention the time that went into Will’s care. He was so accomplished, Will wondered how he had come to deserve such a man. He felt proud—as if Hannibal was his to begin with.

*

Will exhaled out an anxious ball of breath as at last Mr. Blanc took his leave. He slumped against the wall—could’ve even fallen asleep on his feet if it came to that. He straightened as Hannibal came back to him, and placed both hands on the sides of Will’s face.

“You have proven yourself to be truthful to your promise,” Hannibal smiled, eyes lingering lovingly all over Will’s face.

Will huffed out a nervous laugh. Really, it was quite funny if you thought about it. Here he was, after having had pretended to lie and act as if he were someone else. And being praised for it.

But then at the same time, he had wanted to be good for Hannibal. He had wanted to act according to what Hannibal had wanted.

“Would I be out of line to ask for a kiss?” Will asked, half-joking; not wanting to be chain up in his room just yet.

“Absolutely not,” Hannibal answered, drawing close. It felt like a reward, Hannibal’s lips. He could barely control himself before Hannibal drew back.

“Come to the kitchen with me.” Hannibal said, twirling their fingers together and already leading Will on. “I’ll make you coffee.”

*

Will sat at the sofa in the kitchen as he held a warm cup of coffee between his hands, and watched Hannibal do the dishes.

“What did you think of him?” Hannibal asked, not looking up.

Will shrugged. “I liked him,”

Hannibal nodded, pleased.

“He didn’t know me as the man who can empathise with killers,” Will admitted. “It was somewhat of a relief,”

Hannibal paused, looked at Will and then smiled. “I’m glad,”

“Thank you for…the meal,” Will said, careful not to ask where the meat had come from. He couldn’t gauge whether it would be acceptable to ask about it.

“Would you like to go to bed—are you tired?” Hannibal asked, finally finished with the washing, and walking over to Will, until he was stooped low on one knee to level his gaze to Will’s. Will recognised this tactic: it was also used for children whom an adult wanted to familiarise themselves with. To gain their trust, or to coax them.

For a second, Will wanted to snap at Hannibal, and ask him why he was going to such a trouble.

Hannibal reached out and took Will’s hand in his, and just like that—all the poisonous thoughts drained away from his mind. “You must be tired,” Hannibal said, rubbing his hand, and it felt so heavenly that Will faced his current truth: he was not quite ready to go to bed, though he was tired. And he was not quite ready to be alone just yet either.

“Can I be honest?” Will asked, timid.

“I encourage you to be honest in everything you say—or do,” Hannibal replied, with a smile.

Will chuckled uneasily. “If I allowed myself to do just that, I’d be dead,” he admitted, honestly.

“I wonder what words you have swallowed unsaid inside of you,” Hannibal said. “I wonder if they burden you,”

Will was speechless, and blinked a few times in silence to indicate so.

“Do they threaten to spill, I wonder.” Hannibal continued.

Will grimaced, but he wanted to be honest. “Surely you must see that—acknowledge that keeping me captive in a basement doesn’t exactly inspire thoughts that can be said out loud,”

Hannibal hummed and stood, walking away. Will felt his heart sink: he’d lost Hannibal now —he had ruined the mood. Lost all the progress that they’d built together. But he saw that Hannibal had only gotten up to pour himself a glass of wine. “I acknowledge it,” he said, after taking a sip.

“How would you feel if someone kept you against your will?” Will asked, his voice adapting a strange, pleading tone.

When Will didn’t receive an answer, he shook his head in frustration. This was a dead-end. There was no use trying to convince Hannibal that what he was doing wasn’t the best for Will. “Forget I said that. You can…bring me to my room now.”

He almost flinched when Hannibal set down his wine glass and returned to him. “What were you to going to answer to my original question? When I asked if you were tired.” Hannibal asked, as if nothing had happened.

“Oh—” replied Will. “I was gonna say that I was tired, but if you’d allow me to stay for a little longer…”

Hannibal smiled, as if warmed by the answer. “And how about now?”

Will huffed nervously. “I’m afraid that…you’d deny me your company just because I’ve admitted to wanting it.”

Hannibal chuckled dryly, and it made Will feel like he was laughing at him; at his helplessness.

“Will,” Hannibal said, extending a hand to Will. “Come here,”

Something bad is gonna happen, Will thought. But he took Hannibal’s hand, and stood up to face him. He wondered if he’d accept Hannibal’s hand just like this even if Hannibal had a knife ready in his hand.

“Our Christmas tree still has some decorating to be done,” he said, as if his eyes didn’t hold a threat. “Would you like to help me with that?”

It wasn’t Will’s fault that he always expected the worse. A little shock ran through him. It sounded too good to be true. “I’d love to,” he replied.

*

Hannibal’s Christmas tree—or, ‘our’ Christmas tree, as Hannibal had referred to it—was more grandiose than Will had expected. He wondered if he’d ever stop feeling awed by the things that Hannibal surrounded himself with.

“I have opted for a bigger tree this year,” Hannibal said from behind Will, shaking his jacket off of his shoulders. “I thought you would like to help me,” he cooed, voice close to Will’s ear.

“Yes, I’d love to,” Will said, in a daze. There were boxes of dazzling ornaments and lights at the base of the tree, waiting to be hung up. Will kneeled on the floor and ran his fingers through the glittering things, surprised at how foreign the sensations felt. His hands only knew the feel of bed sheets and cold metals, down where he lived. He stood up and began hooking the bulbs through the twigs, and caught Hannibal looking at him with something like endearment. Will smiled, wanting to maintain this illusion that yes, they were just a couple—who had only each other for family—decorating a Christmas tree.

“Been a long time since I shared a Christmas with someone—other than dogs,” Will said.

Hannibal offered him a gentle smile, one that creased the corner of his eyes, and made Will’s heart melt with affection. “Are you glad for the company?”

Will smiled, a bitterness just hiding beneath—once again reminded that this peaceful scene was really just an illusion.

“No one likes to be alone, no matter what they say,” he replied, shrugging. “No one likes to dine alone,”

“Indeed they don’t,”

“And—dying alone is a common fear,”

Hannibal stayed silent for a while, busy with his hands.

“But yes—I’m thankful that you’re allowing me this,” Will said, before it was too late. “Though I’m not exactly in a position to gift you anything,” he added.

“There is hardly any need for that. You yourself are a gift to me, Will.”

Will had to look away. It was hard when Hannibal said such things—things that broke his heart. It was clear that Hannibal cherished him—even loved him. But, not enough to trust him, Will reminded himself. And that, somehow, was worse than if Hannibal didn’t love him. Because what was love without trust?

Mrs. Anna Blanc had died in a car crash, Hannibal had told him. Will wondered if he should've died when he'd been hit, too.

*

Hannibal let Will put the finishing touches on the tree—and for a brief, sickening second, Will felt like a child. He had been reduced to feeling giddy at activities that entertained children. He stepped back and inspected the tree, pretending to admire it, and simultaneously retreating into self-pity. But then he felt Hannibal's warm, grounding hand place itself around his shoulders—and he felt alright, somewhat. They were both sharing this misery—Will wasn't alone in this darkness.

Suddenly, Will wanted to push his luck—and damn the consequences. "Hannibal," he spoke. "Can I ask for just one more thing?"

Hannibal looked back at him in alarm, but turned himself to Will and nodded. "Go on," he said.

"I—" he faltered under Hannibal's gaze—which could turn so cold in mere seconds. "I want to sleep in our old bed…just for one night," he said, briefly wondering if Hannibal would take away his morning walk if he was allowed this instead.

But Hannibal was nodding. Maybe he was a little drunk, who knew what made him agree to it. "Would you like a bath first?" he asked.

Will nodded eagerly, unbelieving at his luck. "Yes—please."

Christmas had come early.

*

"Why are you allowing me this?" Will asked, unable to shut his brain off, due to the excitement. He nuzzled against Hannibal's neck, deliciously warm from the bath that they had shared. "I haven't exactly been behaving myself," he added.

"How so?" Hannibal said, voice a little tired. Maybe Will ought to shut up.

"I don't know…backtalk? I haven't been as obedient as I wish I could be." he said, as if suggesting punishment.

"You are well aware that your inability to sometimes hold your tongue plays into our dynamics," Hannibal replied. "It is one of the reasons that draws me to you,"

Will chuckled. "I don't know how you endure me,"

"You are able to get away with things I would never tolerate in someone who isn't you," Hannibal said. "Though I wouldn't necessarily say that your backtalk—as you say—is your worst trait."

"What is my worst trait?"

Hannibal thought for a moment, rubbing circles into Will's shoulder with his thumb. "Your habit of self-doubt," he replied, at last. "You are more profound than you think you are,"

Will remained silent, stupefied by such words. He didn't think that it was true about him, but Hannibal was most definitely telling the truth. And wasn't he the chosen one, who a serial killer *hadn't* decided to kill? There was something special about him, that he had survived for this long.

As if to answer, he lifted his hand from where it had rested against Hannibal's chest, and caressed his cheek. Hannibal had opted to let him sleep unshackled, and he hadn't even asked for it. Maybe Hannibal was trying to learn how to trust him again. He turned Hannibal's face so that they were nose to nose, and laid a kiss onto Hannibal's lips. He didn't know what to say, and the only thing that felt sure was that he loved Hannibal. So he whispered it, because he wanted Hannibal to know.

"I love you too, Will." came the reply.

*

When morning came—or dawn, to be exact—Will was nudged awake. Somehow he'd fantasised that he would wake up before Hannibal, and gaze longingly at his face until his eyelids fluttered open. But he knew why he was being waken at dawn. There was less of a chance of someone catching sight of Will while he had his walk.

He swallowed his dismay and smiled as Hannibal brushed his hair back from his face. "Good morning," he croaked.

"Good morning, Will." Hannibal said. "Ready for your walk?"

*

Being outside was a disappointment, compared to all the things that he had been allowed to experience the night before. The sun was barely out, and even so, it was going to be weak. He'd become too used to being warm inside, so his body protested in violent shivers—even though Hannibal had wrapped him up pretty good. He hitched the scarf higher over his nose, leaving only his eyes to the elements as they walked slowly around the neighbourhood. "I can't do this," Will blurted out, laughing in spite of the disappointment. "It's too cold!" he turned back to the house, speeding up his steps despite being aware that he wasn't allowed to run. But he heard soft laughter from Hannibal too, who also seemed to be suffering, but didn't show it. They ran home and barged in, instantly heating up and having to peel off layers of clothing.

"Let me make you coffee," Hannibal said, and pulled Will into the kitchen with him.

Once Will had stopped shivering, and some feeling had returned to his limbs, he sat in his designated sofa on the corner and took to observing Hannibal—which he seemed never to tire of.

“Don’t you ever get tired of cooking?” Will asked, standing to take a look at what was smelling so good.

“Never,” Hannibal said, throwing him a loving look.

Will laughed and moved closer—he knew that he wasn’t allowed to, because knives, and other things that could be used as a weapon were just in reach. But he had developed a taste for this. He wanted to see what Hannibal would allow him—or wouldn’t allow him. He casually but silently nudged closer to Hannibal until he was directly behind him, and before Hannibal could decide to do anything about it—circled his hands around Hannibal’s waist. He made a relieved sound as he plastered the side of his face to the middle of Hannibal’s neck, and felt Hannibal stiffen. The fact that he didn’t immediately discipline Will was enough to convince Will that Hannibal actually cared about him. He imagined Hannibal wavering the same way when he’d eventually decide to kill him.

“I missed you,” Will said. He felt Hannibal stop stirring and turn his head sideways to indicate that he had heard. A few minutes passed as Hannibal continued cooking and Will stayed as he was, soaking up the opportunity to bask in Hannibal’s kindness. No, not kindness—trust. He was trusting Will not to act irrationally—turning a blind eye to the fact that Will was completely capable of wielding a knife, and taking someone’s life with it.

Breakfast was soured by the fact that Will would have to return to his cage as soon as it was over. He chewed his food slowly, but not too slow to be unreasonable about it. They avoided each other’s eyes, both aware of what was to come. As Will was escorted back to his room, it felt like there was something that was being left unsaid. He realised bitterly that he was supposed to be down on his knees, begging Hannibal not to imprison him again—but in all honesty, he was too tired for that. He smiled and took Hannibal’s hand in his, brushing it to his cheek. “Thank you for last night…for breakfast too,” he said, voice shaking.

All Hannibal could do was to smile back. Will saw clearly that Hannibal didn’t actually want to be doing this. It was hurting him. Will had forced them into this situation where they had become both each other’s prisoners. He received a last kiss from Hannibal and tried not to cry when the door was shut and locked.

Will shuffled to his plain bed and slumped down. He felt a cold sadness wash away all the love that Hannibal had showered him with. What a fool he’d been, he reflected. This was how conditioning worked, and he was letting Hannibal do it to him without a fight. Hannibal would give him unconditional love, and reward him for being obedient. His brain would make the connection, until he’d be acting just as Hannibal wanted him to. Hot tears streamed down his cheeks—this was his life now. He was alive, but really, he was dead—probably had been since he’d fallen into Hannibal’s hands. His life was over. His body belonged to Hannibal, and so did his mind.

Will cursed as he realised that he hadn’t even managed to sneak anything in with him—he could've stolen a kitchen knife. He could’ve stolen anything really, because Hannibal hadn’t even bothered check him. He’d trusted Will not to take anything. And that made him feel worse, for some reason. Hannibal had trusted him and here he was, crying that he had missed the opportunity to betray him, once again.

# Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Hannibal gives Will an unconventional Christmas present...

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the long delay and the short chapter, I hope you understand (end-of-the-year depression is hitting me hard). I'm feeling a little meh about this chapter.

Feels like it's not good enough, or whatever. Advice on what to improve is welcome!

Once again, thanks for taking your time to read.

Will woke up with Hannibal's hands tangled in his hair. "Merry Christmas, Will."

"It's Christmas?" Will croaked.

"Indeed it is."

"Merry Christmas, Hannibal." Will replied, without malice. He paused for a second, and then leaned up to press a kiss onto Hannibal's cheek. The resulting blush was so satisfying to watch that Will couldn't keep from smiling. It felt like a Christmas present in itself.

"We will be spending our day together," Hannibal said.

Will sat up, undeniably giddy but not letting it on.

"We will be venturing out," Hannibal said. "After breakfast, that is."

Will was so overcome with excitement that he leapt up and circled his arms around Hannibal's neck."Thank you," he whispered.

*

Will only realised after breakfast that he didn't exactly know what "venturing out" meant. Were they going to dine out, or go on a walk, or what? But he realised now, that it meant going to someplace devoid of people. Away from the city. Instead of the usual shirt and slacks, Will was presented with proper outdoor attire. He was impressed with it, and felt

excitement bubbling in his chest at how familiar it all had been, once. The promise of the great outdoors—the scent of trees—he could almost taste it on his tongue.

“Where are we going?” Will asked, sliding his feet into heavy-duty snow boots. Hannibal was doing the same.

“We are going to hunt,” Hannibal said, matter-of-factly. When he returned his eyes back to Will, Will immediately gathered that he wasn’t supposed to ask beyond that.

Really, what had he really expected? They weren’t going to be hunting *animals*. Or, rather, they were—from Hannibal’s point of view. People were no better to him than pigs.

Will looked around for any hunting gear, but it seemed that Hannibal had taken care of that already. He crawled into the passenger seat of a car that he didn’t even know Hannibal had had, and sat thinking, curious how Hannibal would present the prey to him. Long into the drive, they remained unspoken. A thick atmosphere of tension circulated in the space between them. Will thought about what he could say to lighten the mood, but found it impossible to impale the silence with words. In the end, as if to ease Will’s anxiety, Hannibal reached out and squeezed his hand as they stopped at a red-light.

Will squeezed back after a second, lifting his gaze to Hannibal—reassuring him that he was okay—he wasn’t going to act irrationally—despite everything.

*

Will was nudged awake once again by Hannibal’s hand in his hair. “We’re here, Will.” he said, a testing smile on his face.

Will nodded, and undid his seat belt. Hannibal leaned over and pulled fur-lined cap on his head, tucking away stray curls. Will smiled—he could have done that himself. But he knew that Hannibal liked doing things like this—liked controlling what Will got to wear or not. Next came a wool scarf that Hannibal wound around his neck, and then gloves, which he handed to Will.

The icy wind hit him strong in the face—he was taken aback, and joyful, if he was honest. He’d gotten too used to being comfortably warm. “Here,” Hannibal said, holding out the windbreaker for Will to slide his arms into.

“Thank you,” Will said, watching as Hannibal did the zipper up. He was ready for anything, now.

Hannibal smiled, set his gloved hands to the sides of Will’s face. “My pleasure,” he said, and then leaned over for a kiss. *This is so romantic,* Will thought. *Hannibal has gone to all this trouble, just for me. Who else would do that?*

But then Hannibal pulled back and reality hit him hard in the face: for a sick second, he imagined that this had been a last kiss. Will was to run as prey, and Hannibal to run after him, as hunter.

He watched nervously as Hannibal produced a rifle from the backseat.

Will gulped, undeniably feeling his heart race.

But then Hannibal handed the rifle to him. Will received it, confused. Was it even loaded yet?

He watched as Hannibal dragged out an unconscious man from the trunk of the car, tied and gagged. Will remained frozen in place as Hannibal splashed cold water onto the man's face. Hannibal seemed amused when the man started panic-screaming, muffled against the wad of fabric in his mouth.

"Behave," Hannibal warned, face stern now.

The man stilled, darting his eyes to Will, as if for help. His gaze fell to the rifle, and then he started screaming again. Hannibal produced a knife from a pocket—which produced more screams—and cut the rope around the man's ankles. Hannibal hoisted him up to stand, and then commanded him to walk.

Will held onto the rifle, feeling his insides churn as he was confronted—yet again—with the realisation that he had the option to fight for his own life. To pull himself away from Hannibal. To kill him.

But the truth was dangling over his head like the sword of Damocles: Will was also a murderer. He was also a cannibal. Hannibal's crimes were his. If he was to kill Hannibal, then it would be better to kill himself along with him. Because there would be no reason to live without Hannibal.

The three of them hiked to the thickest part of the forest—as Hannibal set the pace, threatened and prodded the victim to move his feet.

"Go," Hannibal said, finally releasing his grip on the victim's wrists. Without hesitation, the man ran in a panic, away and deeper into the forest. He was to have a head-start.

"You know what to do, Will." Hannibal said, turning to Will.

Will turned to Hannibal, gaze wide and intense. He allowed himself to want the chase; excitement was creeping into his bloodstream.

"Do you know what you have to do?" Hannibal said, glancing at the rifle in Will's hands.

No, he wouldn't kill Hannibal with something so simple as a rifle. It would be too clean. He'd have to opt for something more intimate—it would be a struggle and reckoning all at once. It would be slow, and it would leave him bloody and righteous.

Will nodded in determination. "Yes,"

*

Will ran to the direction that his prey had taken—he hadn't been given a long time, but he had managed to disappear completely from Will's sight. But Will knew how to hunt—he

knew how to stalk his prey, and bide his time. The rifle felt sturdy and sure in his hands—strange how his body seemed to remember how to act, in the situation that he was in.

He walked a long time before he saw an unmistakable strip of red cloth stuck to a tree—obviously from the victim's windbreaker. Will studied the forest floor and found messy footprints that had been badly concealed, along with down feathers that had come loose from the tear in the windbreaker. It was barely visible against the snow, but it was there. Will followed them as quietly as possible, rifle steady in his hands. His vision was hyper-focused, and his mind sharp.

Suddenly he heard the victim cry out as he took a tumble in the snow—Will pounced forward and ran.

"No, please," the victim was trying to say, through the wad of fabric in mouth. He tried to stand up and tripped; tried again to stand, and began shuffling away—but Will was too close.

"Please—" the man begged, looking back at Will, and then finally giving up. He fell into the snow, and turned to face Will, crawling away from him as Will lifted the rifle. A sense of euphoria flooded his bloodstream. Will didn't waver, and pulled the trigger point-blank. Immediately, the man fell back, a clean bullet hole in the dead centre of his forehead.

*

Will didn't know how long he waited sat there in the snow, against the trunk of a tree. His mind was completely blank—just like the pure white snow that was surrounding him. Eyes closed, he tipped his head back—and frowned in puzzlement as he realised that he was at peace.

Slowly, he heard Hannibal step through the crunching snow. He heard him crouch down, and then place his hand onto Will's shoulder.

Will finally opened his eyes, and turned to Hannibal—as if to prove that no, he wasn't conflicted about this. At least, not yet.

"Ready to go home?" Hannibal asked, affectionate.

Will smiled and nodded.

They shared hot coffee in the car after having loaded the body back into the trunk, soft orchestral music swirling around them. Hannibal watched Will closely, as if for signs of distress—and Will only wanted this peace to last just a little longer.

*

Just as the city started coming back into view, Will felt the first twinges of guilt. It was as if he'd taken a drug, and its effect was just wearing off.

"What was he to you?" Will asked, apropos of nothing. "Why did he have to die?"

Hannibal glanced at Will, and then shrugged. "He was…rude,"

“What?” Will said, unexpectedly riled up. “What did he do?”

“He was rude,”

“Rude? And that’s enough reason for him to be dead?”

“Yes,”

Will looked back out the window, feeling his insides boil with frustration. “Who are you to judge if he should die?”

“Who is truly worthy to judge? God?”

Will sighed and rolled his eyes.

“By your hand or God’s, it doesn’t matter.” Hannibal stated.

Will chuckled. Oh, yeah. It wasn’t actually Hannibal who had killed the man. It was himself. Shouldn’t he have questioned himself enough—and just like this—before he had pulled the trigger?

“Yeah—cause we all die in the end anyway,” Will huffed, crossing his arms and shutting Hannibal out for the rest of the drive home.

*

Will bolted into the house, heading straight for the basement—he needed to be alone, away from where he could see the body. Away from Hannibal.

“Will,” Hannibal warned, following closely.

Will laughed, a shrill and ugly sound. “Why do I always end up doing what you want me to do?” He felt his fists jerk with the need to strike. But wouldn’t that just be what Hannibal would want from him? Uncontrollable anger and violence?

“You do it because you would do anything for me, wouldn’t you, Will?” Hannibal said, a strange smile on his face, as if by saying such daring words, he was sacrificing a part of himself. “You’ve never felt as alive as you do now, with me.”

Hannibal wasn’t wrong: that was the bitter truth. Will scowled, bereft at the accuracy. “Sometimes I think back to the moment I first laid eyes on you—and—I think, I should’ve known. But I couldn’t have known, could I?”

“What are you trying to say, Will?”

“I never asked for any of this!” Will said, delirious. “What have you done to me?”

“You were always like this, Will. You had suppressed yourself to the point that your true self needed to be pried out of you,” Hannibal said, and then, he drew closer to Will. “I saw you killing him,” Hannibal said, calmly. “I watched you. You were glorious—radiant.”

“Radiant?” Will spat out. “I’m just a toy that you play with for your own amusement—” Will shouted. And then suddenly, he felt his world tumble—when he regained his balance, his ears were ringing, and he was crouched on all fours on the floor. Hannibal had slapped him. So hard, that he had lost his bearings for a second. Hannibal had done a lot to him—but never slapped him like this. This felt different.

“Behave, Will.” Hannibal warned—his voice had an edge to it, as if he were about to lose his patience any second now.

Suddenly, Will wanted it—wanted rage to blind him, for Hannibal to hit him—punish him, just so he could stop thinking about the man he had just murdered. “Make me,” Will growled.

And then all at once, he was being dragged by the hair. Surprisingly, it wasn’t to the basement that he was being led to, but Hannibal’s—their—old bedroom. Even through the haze of anger, Will felt excitement spike his blood.

He grunted as Hannibal roughly tossed him onto the bed, and then began ripping off his clothes. He kicked and fought just to poke the embers of Hannibal’s anger further, and received a deafening slap across the cheek once again. Will stilled for a moment, unable to do anything—and before he knew what was happening, he was completely naked and laying on his stomach. His arms were being tied behind his back—just like the man he had killed earlier in the day. Will chuckled deliriously.

“Be careful, Will.” Hannibal warned. "This is no laughing matter."

Will only turned his face to Hannibal and grinned. “What’s the worst that can happen anyway?” he said. “My life isn’t worth much to me.”

“But Will—you see, I would never take your life.” Hannibal replied. “But I have the choice and power to prolong your suffering.”

Will dropped his smile, bitterly.

“And you do suffer so beautifully,”

Will tried to nudge his body away from whatever Hannibal was doing. He felt the rough texture of ropes around his ankles. “What are you doing?” he asked, instead.

“Restraining you—like the beast that you so act like,” Hannibal said.

Will sighed, audibly—feigning to not care. But he knew that in time, he *would* be caring. Hannibal would slowly wring out his obedience and restore it. There would be no other choice.

It was going to be a long, long evening.

*

Once Hannibal had hog-tied him, Will readied himself for what was to come. Surprisingly, instead of Hannibal shoving his cock down his throat—which would’ve been not so bad—

Will got what he had wished for: solitude. It was only after half an hour later that he realised that he didn't actually want it. His limbs were starting to feel numb, and the cold was periodically forcing his body into violent shivers. His knees had been tied apart with something wedged in between them: he couldn't even roll over to lay on his side for some relief.

And the pain—the pain was getting to him, more than he liked to admit. But determined not to give in, he kept his mouth shut and stayed where he was. What was Hannibal doing anyway? Probably butchering meat for their Christmas dinner.

Finally—finally, Will heard Hannibal's footsteps approach. Will turned his face away, unwilling to give Hannibal a glimpse of his suffering. He tried to pretend to sleep, as if this was nothing to him. But his body was tense: no one would be fooled by his act.

Will felt the bed dip beside him. "How's the pain?" said Hannibal, his voice deadly close to Will's ear.

Will ignored him, but had to flinch away when he felt fingers run along his nape. "Don't."

But the hand didn't seize its lingering. "Don't touch me!" Will said again, louder this time. He turned his head to Hannibal, glaring at him—wanting to make sure that he meant what he was saying.

"Why not?" Hannibal said, the picture of perfect ease. His hand drifted down the centre of Will's spine—slowly, seductively.

"H-Hannibal…stop." Will warned, turning his face into the mattress. Hannibal's hand lowered until inevitably, it slid down to grab at his ass—Will felt Hannibal groan against his ear. And then a finger slid between his cheeks.

Will stayed silent—he was rendered speechless, feeling the first stings of arousal. He almost let out a gasp when Hannibal's lips came to press on his neck, just where he liked it the most.

"Do you want me to stop?" asked Hannibal, voice gruff with arousal. "Hmm?"

Will remained silent, willing Hannibal to keep doing whatever that he was doing.

"Will?" Hannibal asked, amusement in his voice. "Do you want me to stop now?"

"Stop torturing me," Will pleaded. He heard a laugh from Hannibal, and then suddenly and sharply, he felt his legs drop as the rope was cut. Roughly, Hannibal turned him over to expose him, aiming to prove how much power his touch had on Will. He chuckled as his eyes landed on Will's erection.

Will looked back with darkened cheeks, humiliated.

"Didn't you want me to stop, Will?" Hannibal asked, running a finger up Will's cock.

Will scowled back, willing his arousal to disappear. But he wasn't going to get off so easily. Hannibal lowered his mouth onto his cock, thoroughly lubricating it—swallowing it whole.

Will gasped, overcome with pleasure. And just like that, Hannibal stopped.

“Please…” Will pleaded.

Hannibal seemed to be taken aback by how easily he had Will back under his control. He returned his hand to circle around Will’s cock, and stroked him slowly, torturously. “How does it feel?”

Will grimaced, trying to ignore Hannibal.

"Be honest, Will."

“Good—it feels so good,” Will gasped.

“Yes?”

“Yes! Please—please don’t stop,” Will begged, his hips impatiently starting to lift into Hannibal’s hold.

“Will,” Hannibal warned, stilling his hand.

“I’ll—I’ll be good,” Will replied, closing his eyes. "Please."

“You take me for a fool,” Hannibal said, drawing away.

“Hannibal—!” Will pleaded.

“I have dinner to attend to,”

“Please don’t leave me like this, please,” Will begged.

“I’ll do as I wish,” Hannibal said, moving to bind Will’s legs to prevent escape. And then, he kissed the side of Will’s forehead, as if in spite.

*

It must have been an hour later or—Will couldn’t even tell anymore. By the time that Hannibal returned, Will was shivering with cold. “I need to use the bathroom,” he said as soon as Hannibal walked over to him.

“Of course you do,” Hannibal observed, unhurried.

“Please,” Will added—playing by Hannibal’s rules yet again.

Hannibal leaned over him and undid all the ropes. He straightened and held out his arms to offer support as Will tried to stand up. But he was too weak—he wobbled and almost fell, feeling sick for a second at the notion that his bladder would let go.

So Hannibal hoisted him up in his arms, and carried him all the way to the bathroom. He sat Will down onto the toilet, and watched. Will felt tears prick at his eyes as he sighed and let

go. When it was done, he stood up shakily and rested the side of his face into Hannibal's chest. "Thank you," he said, as Hannibal smoothed a hand down the back of his head.

"Let's get you dressed for dinner," Hannibal said, voice warm in Will's ear.

*

Yet again, the meat was masterfully disguised as that not of a human being. It looked like an expensive cut of roasted beef—nothing more than that. Glistening and sizzling, sure to make anyone drool.

The surrounding side-dishes were tame comparing to the star of the table. Roasted vegetables and mashed potatoes; gravy. There was a dark red bottle of wine being poured as Will took his place.

Hannibal carved the slab of meat, and laid it beautifully onto Will's plate. Will chuckled. "You're sick," he said—before he could stop himself.

"So are you," Hannibal replied, unoffended. "You provided the meat for our feast tonight,"

Will blinked hard, stifling a sigh.

Hannibal watched him closely, as if Will would refuse to eat meat again. But Will was willing to be compliant—the pain around his wrists and ankles were reminders that he was to behave. He summoned the painful memory of the past hour and cut into the steak; he lifted the fork to his mouth and chewed delicately, feeling satisfaction wafting off of Hannibal.

"Have I prevented you from throwing a Christmas dinner for your…friends?" Will asked, as the silence grew thicker.

"No," Hannibal said, matter-of-factly.

Will nodded, somewhat disappointed. Of course he wasn't the only one who existed in Hannibal's life. He had other people to attend to, too. Jealousy poked at him as he imagined Hannibal paying attention to some one else—and if he were to pay more than attention…if Hannibal were to be nursing another romance, how was Will to know? He began to feel sick, slightly. It sickened him that he was jealous too.

"But you come first," Hannibal said. "I'm hosting a delayed dinner tomorrow night to indulge them,"

"Do you have to?"

"I have to keep up appearances, I suppose."

Will slid his food around. "Was it terribly lonely…before me?" He asked, curious.

"You were as lonely as I was. Were you lonely?" Hannibal asked.

Will shrugged, thinking. “I didn’t let myself think about it too much. But then I met you—it was only then that I realised how lonely I’d been.”

Hannibal reached out and took Will’s hand. “I wouldn’t be myself anymore, without you.”

What a thing to say. Will had to look away. “I don’t feel worthy of your love. Feel like I have to earn it.”

“You have earned it.” Hannibal said, taking Will’s chin in his hand, directing his gaze back. “You have done a great many things to earn it.”

Without fail, the image of the hunt flashed into Will's mind.

“And you have seen what I see. You have heard the music in screams—the beauty in chaos. I couldn’t have that with anyone else, Will.”

Will held Hannibal's gaze—and realised that it was true. In a sick, twisted way, they were made for each other.

*

Will waited with a mug of tea in his hands as Hannibal did the dishes. He felt subdued, but aware that his anger would return some day soon, and they would repeat the cycle all over again. He drew the wool blanket tighter around him, sleepy from exhaustion, and flinched when he saw Hannibal come to crouch before his feet.

He let the mug be taken away from him, and smiled as Hannibal brushed his knuckles against the side of his face. “You know that I love you, Will.” Hannibal whispered.

“I know,” Will said.

“Are you up for a bath?” Hannibal asked, head tilted. So tender. So kind.

Will nodded, though he was barely conscious. Had Hannibal put something in his tea?

“Come, then.” Hannibal said, standing and extending his hand.

*

Will woke up groggy the next morning, frowning as he tried to recollect the events of the previous night. He didn’t remember being escorted back into the basement. He only remembered a languorous bath—Hannibal running a deliciously warm cloth all over his body. He remembered feeling so blissful that he thought his soul might fly away—he remembered Hannibal jerking him off and telling him that he was a good boy. And that had felt so, so good.

Will felt a twinge of something like sadness and fear. He had been sedated because he was becoming too much for Hannibal to handle. All his constant questions and struggles to accept who he really was...maybe Hannibal had decided that he wasn't worth the trouble. He didn’t want to deal with Will anymore.

He sat up with anxiety: was Hannibal going to get rid of him now?

# Chapter 10

Will was able to calm his worries for the time-being: Hannibal wouldn't kill him that very day because there was a Christmas party to attend to. Preparations to be made, and guests to entertain. Will's death would be planned and slow—so for now, he was safe. Or as safe as he could be.

When Hannibal came down to hand him his breakfast, Will thanked him quietly and turned away, waiting for him to leave, so that he could wallow in his gloom. Try as he might, he couldn't help but feel hurt that he was going to be down here, while Hannibal was free to do as he pleased, free to do things without Will to share them with.

"Will?" Hannibal called, peering to catch Will's eyes.

Will didn't reply, but merely looked up.

"What is the matter?"

Will chuckled bitterly. "What *could* be the matter?" He shrugged Hannibal's hand off when it came to rest on his head.

"I apologise in advance—today I won't be able to come down here as much," Hannibal said. It felt sincere enough. Will shrugged.

"I will bring down your meals later," Hannibal continued.

And when Will didn't answer, Hannibal came to sit beside him.

"Will?"

"Hmm?"

"Are you alright?"

"I don't know," Will replied.

"Will." Hannibal's hand came to rest on Will's shoulder. It took all his might not to shake it off.

"I'm just trying to be honest in my feelings, Hannibal. Don't you encourage honesty?"

Hannibal paused, jaw clenched and impatient.

"Speaking of honesty—did you drug me, last night?" Will asked.

A pause, and then a simple: "Yes," Hannibal answered.

Will glared—there was no way to make Hannibal feel sorry for it.

“I wanted you to have a fitful sleep,”

“Yeah, right.” Will said, turning away from Hannibal, as if dismissing him. Hannibal, surprisingly, chose not to reprimand Will for acting the way that he was. He threaded a hand through Will’s hair lovingly, and inched closer to attempt a kiss—as if that could fix the rift between them. Will tried to shrug him off, frustrated. It was hardly the time or the mood for such things. But it wasn’t so easy to get away from Hannibal. He hissed sharply as Hannibal tightened his hold and forced Will to face him. Will stared with open anger, uncaring of the consequences. Hannibal stared at him too—with eyes that were warning him. But then he leaned closer and forced a kiss, a deep one. Will allowed it—really, what choice did he have? He kept his eyes open, as if glaring at Hannibal could possibly achieve something.

“We will talk later,” Hannibal said. “Yes?”

“Yes.”

*

Will faced the wall and pretended to sleep the next time Hannibal came down. “I will be occupied later, so I have brought your lunch and dinner now.” he said, taking the time to sit on the edge of the bed and placing a hand on Will’s waist.

“Will?” Hannibal called, peering at his face.

Will didn’t open his eyes, but brought his hand up and placed it on top of Hannibal’s. “Thank you,” he answered, making a show of being obedient.

“I’m afraid your dinner will be cold.”

“That’s okay,”

“Thank you for understanding.” Hannibal said, lowering his head and placing a kiss onto Will’s knuckles. A sudden idea went through Will’s mind, then. He turned to look at Hannibal over his shoulder, and smiled to show that he was okay, and that he was grateful. He wanted Hannibal to *not* to worry about him.

Hannibal lowered down and rested his chin onto Will’s shoulder for a moment, and then pressed a kiss onto his temple. “I will come back to you as soon as I’m free,” he assured Will.

“Hannibal—it’s okay. I want you to enjoy yourself.” Will said.

Hannibal regarded him, as if trying to catch a lie in Will’s eyes.

“I mean it,” Will said.

At last, Hannibal smiled. “Thank you, Will.”

*

As soon as Hannibal left, Will sprung out of bed.

It would be hours before Hannibal would come down again—maybe even the next day. But by then, Will would have had plenty of time to have carried out his plan. Sharp objects were hard to come by down here in the basement, but Will knew that he had an unlikely weapon that he had once noticed in one of the hardcover books that Hannibal had brought him. His heart had pounded with hope at the sight of how sharp the edges of the cover were—how he had managed to let it slip out of his mind, he didn't know.

But first—he undressed and hopped into the shower at the corner of his room. He turned the water to scalding hot, to help his blood flow better. Will didn't have any mirrors in his room for obvious reasons—but he could see his reflection faintly in the glass door. It was like looking at someone else—a stranger. Will flinched when he realised that what he felt for the stranger was pity. He felt himself crumbling to pieces, and his eyes started to water. Maybe it was the right thing to do: to put this pitiful thing out of his misery.

Will took a deep breath and cut the water off. He dried himself and then dressed, trying not to rush, lest Hannibal was watching through the camera. He made a show at selecting and slid the designated book out of its place in the stack, and crouched at the foot of his bed. He liked to assume this position often when he read—he was sure Hannibal wouldn't find it suspicious if he was watching.

Now was the time. He tried not to think of Hannibal. He tried to conjure of thoughts of finally being at peace. He fingered the sharp edge of the cover and found it satisfactory. A quick drag over his inner wrist, and then all he'd have to do was wait.

Will kept his eyes open—but really, he was seeing something else. He saw Hannibal's face distorted in sudden shock at the discovery of his lifeless body—at his own failure of not succeeding in changing Will. Will tried to taste satisfaction in that. But what he felt instead was that he was betraying Hannibal, and hurting the one man that he had ever loved. *But Will*, a voice said. *You don't actually love him. He's made you love him. He's emotionally warped your senses so that all you see is him.*

All these thought went on and on, until Will was convinced that the only way to stop the thoughts would be to kill himself. In one swift motion, Will brought the corner hard into this skin, and then quickly did the other arm. At first, he felt nothing—but then it descended on him, heavy and blinding. He almost cried out, and finally felt the blood seep out. Will peered at the opening, satisfied and horrified to see that he had been able to penetrate through the fat. Shakily, he stood up and moved to the bed, as if he had made himself sleepy by reading. He bunched up the sheets around him to conceal any dark spots that might appear on the camera.

Finally, Will closed his eyes, writhing quietly in pain. Would death come to him willingly this time, or would it allude him, like it had before?

*

Fate was cruel for how it played out for Will. Or was it merely luck that Hannibal had been a surgeon once? No matter how extreme the trauma that Will could subject himself to, Hannibal would almost always be able to bring him back to life.

Will frowned to discover that he wasn't in the basement anymore—instead, he was in Hannibal's bedroom. He tried to lift himself up but his hands were restrained. His wrists throbbed with pain in time with the ache in his head. Hannibal had denied him painkillers, Will reflected. Maybe he deserved that. He lifted his chin to find that yes, his ankles were restrained too.

Just then, the door slid open, and Hannibal walked in bearing a tray, calmly shutting the door. He approached Will and stood watching, as if waiting for an apology. When none came, he dragged a chair close to the bed and sat down. "I thought I was going to lose you, Will." he said, finally. There seemed to be genuine remorse in his eyes. Even his voice was different, as if he had been shouting.

Will remained silent, not knowing what to say. For the time being at least, he despised Hannibal with all his might—he couldn't give less of a shit.

"Here," Hannibal said, bringing a piece of pancake to Will's mouth. "Eat. I will give you painkillers."

Will shook his head.

Hannibal lowered the fork, and then after a moment, set the tray aside—he was willing to be kind. Will cowered away as much as he could when Hannibal's hand came to touch his face. "Don't. Just, don't." he pleaded. He didn't want Hannibal's touch; didn't want the tenderness that came with it. It always left his mind clouded, and made him question himself all over again.

"Will," Hannibal coaxed.

"Just kill me, Hannibal." Will said, sharp. "What am I to you anyway? I'm just a plaything, a slave for you to fuck—to be kept at your whim and mercy." Will said. "Is that all that you have been conditioning me for? I thought you had better plans for my mind."

Hannibal waited, ever patient.

"I don't want to be here anymore," Will said.

"But I love you, Will." Hannibal said out, as if that made it better.

"You're not listening, Hannibal." Will projected. "I don't want to be here anymore. Let me go."

Maybe this was the first time that Will had seen Hannibal lose his patience. The tenderness in his eyes disappeared. "Why would I let you go when I want you all to myself?" he said, as if it was the most obvious thing to say.

Will huffed in frustration.

Hannibal retrieved the tray again, to feed Will. "Open up."

"No,"

“I would rather not force you,” Hannibal said.

“Only if you undo the restraints,” Will said.

“You know I cannot allow your hands to roam free.” Hannibal said. “Eat, Will.” He nudged the fork against Will’s mouth. Will huffed, defeated; and then took the bite.

*

He was bed-ridden for the time being: it reminded him of when he had first set foot into Hannibal’s house: hazy and medicated with a trusting mind, and broken bones.

“Sorry for ruining your new year,” Will said, bitterly. Hannibal was acting the role of a care-taker. He devoted most of his time to Will’s recovery. Privacy was a foreign thing.

The hardest part of his new routine was that Hannibal chose to sleep with him. And that was something that Will could never turn down. He felt himself warming to physical touch, to soothing caresses on his head; to kisses pressed to his temples. It was easy to feel love for Hannibal in the dark like this—easy to melt under his touch.

But daylight brought clarity—he recoiled at his behaviour, for how weak he had been, to seek comfort from a man who had broken him, over and over again.

Will thought of other ways to rebel—no, not rebel. Punish wasn’t quite it either. What Will wanted to do was to make Hannibal empathise with him. Make him feel what Will was feeling—how much he was hurting. How much he was suffocating.

The easiest way to get to Hannibal, to get his full attention, would be to refuse what Hannibal took the most pride in: his meals. Will would refuse to eat, he decided. No matter the hunger.

After gaining some of his strength, he refused any food that Hannibal brought near his mouth. “Surely you must be a little hungry,” Hannibal had reasoned.

Will shook his head, staring at the distance. Hannibal had gotten so used to Will’s complete surrender—he was still choosing to believe that Will didn’t have other motives in mind.

“Have a few bites—you must keep yourself nourished,” Hannibal urged.

Will turned away. “Not hungry,” he murmured. “But thank you.”

Hannibal fell silent, retracting the spoon.

“I’ll eat it later,” Will said, curious to see what Hannibal would do. Of course, he’d need Hannibal’s assistance to eat, but he would deal with that problem later.

“Very well,” Hannibal replied, placing the tray on the table.

Will remained uninterested and unmoving. When Hannibal stood up to leave, he paused as if expecting Will to protest; to stay just a little longer. Will watched as Hannibal took slow steps to the door. Will didn’t say anything, and that had caught Hannibal off-guard. He caught a

glimpse of Hannibal's hurt face just as he shut the door. It was confirmed then, that Will's plan was in motion.

*

Hannibal appeared with a new tray of dinner, a look of disapproval in his eyes. Will didn't bother to look up. Frankly, he didn't have much energy.

"I hope you're hungry," Hannibal stated, placing a hand on the side of Will's arm. Will sighed. He was not going to cave in just because Hannibal's touch felt so affectionate. It was just a tactic: Hannibal knew how to touch Will.

"What's wrong?" Hannibal asked, tilting his head closer to peer at Will. "Fever?" He placed his hand on Will's forehead, and then traced it down the side of his face. Will turned away. It was proving to be too much.

"You don't seem to have a fever," Hannibal said, returning his hand onto Will's arm. "Risotto, just the way you like it," he said. Will swallowed, the aroma wafting to hit him full in the face.

Hannibal began blowing on a mouthful of risotto. He brought the spoon to Will. "Eat, Will. Please, for me."

Sweet words to entice him into doing whatever Hannibal wanted. Will grimaced and shook his head. It was then that Will saw a shift in Hannibal's eyes. The loss of patience. Hannibal withdrew his hand and began twirling the spoon, choosing to keep calm.

"I am going to refrain from asking if you're refusing food just to punish me." Hannibal said. "Instead I am going to ask: why are you doing this? What is it that you want to say to me?"

Will stared back, as if daring Hannibal to hit him. And that was okay: he had been hit before. He could very well take it.

It seemed that Hannibal didn't have much patience for him that night. Which was fine, really. He wasn't going to give in, not until Hannibal could see that Will was suffering.

"Suit yourself," Hannibal said, taking the tray with him.

*

"How do you feel today?" Hannibal asked, the next day.

Will thought of lying, of playing as docile as possible—but he knew that he was burning inside to let out some words to ease his angst. He felt disarmed, unable to do anything about it. "Like a caged bird." he answered, simply.

"But do you want to fly away?" Hannibal offered, something to ruminate over. "Do you truly want that?"

The answer, of course, was conflicting. On one hand he knew that a sane person would want to be as far away from Hannibal Lecter as possible. On the other hand, that part of him that had come to recognise Hannibal as the only person who could understand him pulled at him to stay where he was. To stay under Hannibal's care, and to let him love him, as he knew how.

Of course, Will couldn't mouth all those words. Grimacing, he spoke: "You take and take—you're feeding off of me, Hannibal. I've got nothing to give you anymore."

Hannibal crossed his legs, considered the answer. It felt like a therapy session. "We feed off of each other," Hannibal countered. "You and I—we are the only ones who can see each other. Know each other. You are nothing without me, as I am nothing without you."

Will's breath caught in his throat. "D-do you actually mean that, Hannibal?" he asked—though he could never trust what Hannibal said anymore. How he could decide was to hear Hannibal say it. He'd have to gauge his voice to know if he was telling the truth.

"With all my heart," Hannibal said, placing his hand on Will's.

*

On the night of the second day, Hannibal chose to show Will his humanity, again. It was a surreal experience, but fuel for him to keep going. Just to spite Hannibal.

"When you're ready to eat, do not hesitate to tell me." Hannibal said, caressing his face. "Water alone cannot sustain you for much longer."

Will nodded, as if he was going to do just that. But he knew—he knew that Hannibal wouldn't just let him die. He'd insert a feeding tube in him, if it came to that.

*

Will's act of rebellion lasted a mere three days. Hannibal was accompanying him back to the bed from a shower when he stumbled harshly—so frail to even see where he was going. He saw sparks, and then the warmth of Hannibal's chest against his own. Unthinkingly, Will brought up his arms around Hannibal's neck and pulled him in for an embrace. As if clinging to the only source of comfort. Hannibal paused, sensing what was happening, and allowed it. "Will you let me take care of you, Will?" Hannibal whispered. "Please."

Will nodded frantically, giving in. He didn't even have the strength to talk anymore.

Hannibal carried Will up off of the floor—and God, how heavenly the feel of Hannibal's body and hands felt then—and placed him lovingly on their bed. Will tried to speak then, to apologise—but Hannibal shushed him, caressed his face.

Will realised how childish he had been, then. What a mistake he'd made—and how was he to seek Hannibal's forgiveness now?

"Drink," Hannibal chided, holding a glass of water to Will's mouth. "Little sips,"

From faraway, the memory of Hannibal giving him water when he had been in the hospital, replayed in his mind. How oblivious he had been.

“I will be right back,” Hannibal said, and disappeared from his side. Surprisingly, he had chosen not to restrain Will. Maybe it was an act of bold trust—or maybe Hannibal knew for certain that Will was really too weak to do anything.

Half an hour later, Hannibal returned to his side with a steaming bowl of soup. He blew on a spoonful and held it to Will’s mouth, smiling when Will didn’t protest. The first time Will had tasted Hannibal’s cooking, it had been this exact recipe. Will felt nourished after a few spoons. “Thank you,” he croaked.

Hannibal smiled.

Will smiled back; or tried to.

“I’ve missed you dearly,” Hannibal admitted, eyes glossy with tears.

Will felt tears spike in his eyes. “I’m so sorry,” he said, letting a tear fall. “I missed you too,”

“Shh,” Hannibal said, focused on feeding Will.

“What was I thinking? I’ve been such a burden,”

Hannibal shushed him again. “I’ll have none of that,”

“You’ve given me everything and this is how I repay you? I’m so sorry, Hannibal.”

Hannibal lowered the spoon and reached out to squeeze Will’s hand. “Everything is going to be alright, Will.” He said.

Will wanted to believe him. So very badly. He nodded.

“Now, Will.” Hannibal said. “Have a bit more,”

*

Just as the body had been quick to deteriorate, it was also quick to heal. Will felt his strength return; felt himself feeling less worn-out. He held still as Hannibal pulled out the stitches, willing them to heal quickly, so that he won’t have to be reminded of them ever again.

And with the return of his bodily strength, the fog that had been clogging up his mind had also disappeared. The nagging questions that had plagued him before he had starved himself came back with renewed force. It terrified him, how much he was about think, how sharp the thoughts were.

He was right back to square one.

“Are you gonna move me back to the basement?” Will asked, as he pressed up against Hannibal in their bed. He had managed to stay where he was, unrestrained but never

venturing away from his designated place.

“I don’t feel compelled to do so,” answered Hannibal. “What do you think?”

Will was obviously taken aback.

“Will you try to escape if you had the chance?”

“Where would I even go?” Will replied, honestly. “You’re all I have, Hannibal.”

The answer seemed to satisfy Hannibal. He pulled Will closer, and pressed a kiss to his temple. “Then it is decided.”

*For now,* Will didn’t add.

# Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Mid-January was approaching fast, and daily routine was to be established again. At least, for Hannibal.

As for Will, he was to “focus on recovery”, as if that took any strength.

Will tried to make bargains: he wanted to keep busy. He wanted to to do some gardening. He wanted to make fishing lures. He wanted to learn how to whittle. He wanted to learn how to play the harpsichord. Anything to keep his thoughts from darkening; from muddying again and leading him down dangerous paths.

It was the first time that Hannibal was going to be leaving Will alone, and unchained. He stooped low to where Will was sitting with a piece of wood, and made steady eye-contact. “I am leaving now,” he informed Will, hand placed lovingly on one thigh.

Will nodded, pretending nonchalance. His eyes glanced down at Hannibal’s show of affection. What show was he putting on? He felt a sudden, sick coil of spite.

“We haven’t fucked in a long time,” Will prompted, as if bitter that Hannibal was leaving him all alone in this house too big for the both of them.

Hannibal only looked at him, face neutral.

“You haven’t initiated sex in a while.”

“What do you want to say, Will?”

“Are you getting it from someone else? You used to be all over me.” Will said.

“If you haven’t noticed, Will, your body is in a delicate condition. This is not the time to be indulging in carnal pleasures.”

Will chuckled, bitterly. “Didn’t know that could stop you.” he said. And then: “You haven’t answered my question.”

“There is no one, and never will be.”

“Thank you for clarifying.” Will said, sarcastically. “I’m just trying to say that I miss you.”

“You could’ve just said that.”

“Our relationship isn’t that simple. You’re aware of that.” Will said, half-sarcastic. “Oh—and,” he continued. “Just letting you know. I really wouldn’t mind being locked in the basement if you’re worried.” It was true, at least. He didn’t mind because he didn’t care

anyway. It wouldn't make much of a difference. He'd still be standing just where Hannibal had left him, unmoving.

He expected Hannibal to suddenly slap him like he had done once before, and drag him to a place less comfortable than the basement. After a long moment of contemplation—as if accepting that words wouldn't prove to be sharp enough to penetrate Will, he set a hand on Will's rummaging hands to still them.

Will looked up, a little annoyed. But the look in Hannibal's eyes made his heart shatter. At times like these, Will wondered how it was that Hannibal had managed to perfect that look of pure love—psychopath that he was. Will almost felt himself wanting to apologise but in this instance, Hannibal was willing to be the better person. He leaned in for a kiss and stood up to leave, as if all was forgiven.

*

Strange how the mind worked: after months of captivity, he felt no desire to set foot outside. If he was completely honest, the idea scared him a little.

Going to the opera—dressing up, and having to *act* as per society's idea of what he should be acting like, was the equivalent of a nightmare. Why Hannibal endured that madness, Will could never figure out.

"I'd be bad company," Will urged, to Hannibal's suggestion that he join him. "Also, I don't know how I'm gonna react…being outside."

"That is true," Hannibal replied.

"I don't wanna risk it," Will pleaded.

Hannibal thought long—as if genuinely trying not to hurt Will's feelings.

"I don't mind being alone, Hannibal."

It surprised him when Hannibal cupped the sides of his face and caressed. "Then you will enjoy a lone evening of your own."

*

Will's hands lingered over Hannibal's shoulders, feeling out the stiff fabric of his dark suit. "You look so handsome," he said, caught off-guard and blushing. It made him a little jealous to think that people would centre their attention on Hannibal—and get to feast him with their eyes.

"Thank you," Hannibal replied, smiling. "I would say that you would look rather dashing in a tuxedo, yourself, Will."

"Stop it," Will replied, and leaned in for a kiss goodbye. He kissed Hannibal so enthusiastically—he knew that he was going to end up wrinkling the suit. Hannibal kissed him back with the same zeal, but withdrew, as if having the same thought.

“There’s a fire in your kiss,” he said, as if pointing out an obvious fact.

“You can’t say things like that and just leave me hanging here,” Will joked, and then kissed Hannibal again.

“Will—” Hannibal pleaded. “I have to leave.”

Finally, Will stepped back. “Have fun, then.”

“Don’t wait up for me,” Hannibal said. “If you’re tired.”

“Okay,”

After that, his “lone evening” was uneventful, to say the least. He had insisted that Hannibal rest his hands for the night and not bother with cooking for him—and so he strode uncertainly into the kitchen. It was an eerie feeling—to stand in the kitchen alone, without Hannibal’s confident presence bustling about it. Will ran his fingers over various utensils—ignoring the fact that Hannibal had locked up the sharper knives. He then moved into the pantry and glided his fingers on ingredients he had no notion of; memorising their feel and texture, or the way that they smelled. It was a lot to process, and it left him feeling full despite not devouring anything. Finally—after how long Will didn’t care to know—Will emerged from the pantry and fumbled around the cabinets, smiling when he found the plain cornflakes that he had asked Hannibal for.

Breakfast for dinner. Something simple, and so devoid of Hannibal’s labour and love. Something that he didn’t have to think about before putting into his mouth.

*

After, Will built a fire in the living room and sat on the floor by the sofa. He tried not to think too hard about this sudden burst of trust from Hannibal. Things had become so peaceful, so devoid of pain—well, at least physical pain—that Will was convinced that all Hannibal was waiting now was for Will to slip up—betray him in some aspect. Or simply to disobey him.

But he had crossed a lot of lines—even let himself run his mouth at times. Still, nothing. In the back of his mind, he knew—felt—something big coming.

But enough about that. He opened his book and flipped to the instructions which he barely needed anymore. He had been overtaken with a sudden obsession of whittling. By how he had probably made a dozen items, each one better than the last. There were calluses hardening in his palms, and small nicks on the corners of his fingers. He liked that he was able to focus on a piece of wood for long stretches of time, and then have something to prove that he hadn’t been sitting idle at the end of the day. Right now, the shape of a bird was emerging out of the wood in his hands.

*

When Will jerked awake—the fire was dwindling and his knife had slipped out of his hand to the floor. Grimacing with a pain in his neck, he was astonished to see that it was still 10pm.

Hannibal wasn't home yet, he was sure. And then a sad thought struck him: who was he without Hannibal, now? How useless, and lonely he was without him. What was he doing, waiting—wasting away, only for Hannibal to come home and make everything all right again? Was this exactly what Hannibal had conditioned him for?

But…he loved Hannibal. That was the truth. Will shifted to sit up, and hummed in embarrassment. Strange that he had been dreaming about Hannibal—and here he was, aching for a touch. He snaked his hand down and felt at his erection, wondering if Hannibal would be mad if he jerked off here and made a mess. What would the punishment be?

Better not—or, better yet…why not prepare himself and wait for Hannibal to come home, so that they could fuck properly? Will chuckled at the absurdity of his thoughts. He *had* been dreaming about Hannibal—and supposedly that made him hard. It was as simple as that. Was it a shocker? Or was it not?

Will gathered his things to store away and made preparations for a douche and a shower. His mind flew to the past—the past when he had first started feeling attracted to Hannibal. How naive he had been; how oblivious. And despite these thoughts, he still found himself wanting to go through with his plan.

*

How best to drop the hint than to prop himself seductively on their bed? Will clothed himself lightly—the undressing part was important to him. It added to foreplay. Instead of his usual boxers and plain white T-shirt, Will pulled out a pair of silk pyjamas that Hannibal always subtly suggested he wear. They were navy, and strangely arousing to wear. He could see the outlines and curves of his body showing through—Hannibal would get the hint. Will settled in, not even trying to diverge his attention to a book—but lazily running his fingers about the waistband of his pants. His eyes fluttered shut blissfully to an in-between place of arousal and sleepiness as he reached a hand down and worked a finger inside of him.

*

Will heard footsteps approaching the bedroom and sat up, trying not to look like he had been touching himself. "Hey," Will said, wary.

Hannibal appeared through a crack in the door, smiling. "You're awake." There was a flush to his cheeks—he had been enjoying himself, Will thought, a little sadly.

"Yeah,"

"We have a guest," Hannibal said, stepping in.

Will frowned. "A guest?"

"Yes," Hannibal said. "Come get dressed."

"But Hannibal—" Will protested, slithering his limbs out of bed. He stayed put until Hannibal came to him—the time that it took for Hannibal to cross the room, he could swear

that he saw a twitch in Hannibal's hand, ready to slap him for being slow in obeying. But instead, Hannibal took notice of the pyjamas, and kneeled before Will with a playful smile.

"What do we have here?" Hannibal mused.

At times like these, it was hard to conjure up the hate that he had for Hannibal, buried deep inside of him. He reached out a hand and laid on the back of Hannibal's neck, leaning in for a kiss. Hannibal allowed it—he straightened himself and pressed closer, until he was kneeling flush in between Will's legs. Will drew his arms tighter around Hannibal's neck when Hannibal pulled away. "More," he pleaded, and then reached a hand down to cup Hannibal's growing erection, as if to remind him that they had reasons to be acting this way.

"We have a guest waiting." Hannibal slurred. He wasn't drunk, but he was brimming with ideas—Will was sure.

"He can wait," Will, said, tilting his head.

"*You* can wait," Hannibal said. "It's rude to have a guest waiting."

Will sighed—he was tired all of a sudden, and not feeling up to whatever Hannibal had in store for him.

"How about after?" Hannibal suggestion, caressing Will under his jaw. "Hmm?"

Will nodded, and then allowed himself to be pulled to his feet.

*

Will wrapped himself in a robe despite being told to dress, and shuffled after Hannibal. Their guest was standing by the fire, inspecting the art on the wall of the living room.

"Will," Hannibal chided, pushing him forward with a hand on the small of his back. "This is Anthony,"

"Anthony Dimmond," the man turned, and threw a lop-sided grin to Will. For a moment, Will was hit with a strange confusion: what was Hannibal doing, bringing a man who looked like Will, into the peace of their home? Was he encouraging jealousy?

And then like a dagger through his heart, he imagined that this man was Will's replacement. Someone who wasn't so high maintenance as Will—someone who went to the opera with Hannibal. He threw a look at Hannibal and then understood what was going to happen. Their guest was going to end up as dinner.

Will approached slowly, lazily receiving Anthony's hand in his, as Hannibal walked to the liquor cabinet and selected drinks for them.

"Stay away from him," Will whispered, a warning or what—Will didn't know. Maybe he just wanted the satisfaction that he had at least warned the poor man.

Anthony pretended to be taken aback, and chuckled. "Dr. Lecter keeps a feisty pet."

“I’m not his *pet*,” Will snarled.

“Then what are you?”

“I—”

Hannibal’s footsteps approached sharply. Will lowered his gaze, and received a glass of whiskey.

“So how long have you been together?” Anthony prompted, walking around liberally and twirling his glass in his hand.

“How was the opera?” Will interrupted, seating himself on the sofa.

“It will be a year this spring,” Hannibal offered, placing himself next to Will.

“My, my.” Anthony answered.

“How do you know Hannibal?” Will asked, louder than necessary.

“Oh, we just met.” Anthony said.

Will whipped his head to Hannibal, looking for explanation. Why was he worthy of Hannibal’s attention? Will swallowed back question after question, on the brink of letting them spill from his mouth. Anthony was going to end up dead anyway—why hold back? But he lifted his drink and swallowed instead.

“Hannibal does have a type,” Anthony said, seductively watching Hannibal.

Hannibal smiled into his glass, one hand lazily caressing Will's back.

“It doesn’t feel like a coincidence that you and I look alike,” Anthony said to Will. And then he shifted his eyes to Hannibal. “Now I know for sure why you brought me here,”

Will stared daggers into Anthony. Frankly, he wanted to throw his glass at his head.

“Tell me—why do you think I have brought you here?” chimed Hannibal—obviously playing with his food, and enjoying it.

Anthony laughed—it was sharp and loud—genuine. It was refreshing to hear. “This is *that* kind of party—is it not?” He looked to Hannibal as if for permission, but then Hannibal looked at Will.

Will gulped—there was no right answer when it came to Hannibal. Would he be disappointed if Will answered no? Or would he be delighted? One thing was clear: Hannibal wanted to kill Anthony. He wanted Will to kill Anthony too. And Will himself—although he was loathe to admit it, *he* also wanted to kill Anthony. It was futile being angry at Hannibal for this. Being angry at Hannibal was like being angry at God. There was no end to it, no catharsis.

Will smiled, stepping out of his nervous role. “What if it was?” he said, dragging his voice so that it sounded devilishly flirtatious. He saw a spark of desire flash in Hannibal’s eyes.

Anthony laughed again, taking it for a joke. But then his smile dropped when he saw how Hannibal was looking at Will. “Well—” Anthony said, finally prompting Hannibal to look at him. “then I am a lucky man.”

Hannibal smiled playfully, satisfied that some plan was in motion.

“Do you do this often?” Anthony asked, shamelessly.

“This?” Hannibal asked.

“Bring back strangers for a threesome?”

“My Will has his appetites.” Hannibal said—what he meant, Will could only guess.

Anthony’s brows shot up. “I would say otherwise. It’s you who has his appetites. Just look at us!”

The nervousness was creeping back in. Will watched Hannibal as Anthony teetered dangerously on the edge of overstepping.

“Will and I look quite alike—you want both of us at the same time. You glass is brimming and you want to chug it all down, damn the consequences.”

He didn’t need a private word with Hannibal to be sure that yes, he was supposed to feel like he wanted to kill Anthony. That had been Hannibal’s design all along, and it was now Will’s design too.

Hannibal played along. “The question is—would you let me chug it all down?”

Anthony knocked back his whiskey, and set the glass down. And then he began a seductive walk, eyes plastered to Hannibal. “I’m curious what the dynamic is between the two of you.” His hands reached to his own neck, undoing the bow tie.

Hannibal smiled. “If you would guess, you would probably be correct.”

“Enough talking,” Anthony said, and stooped down to undo Hannibal’s tie.

But Hannibal stopped him. “Undress Will first.”

Will, until then, frozen in his place as if he were a ghost witnessing their interaction, drew his feet up and tried to cower away.

“What’s wrong?” Anthony mused.

“Hannibal—” Will whispered, as if Anthony wasn’t there right in front of them. You don’t fuck where you eat, Will wanted to say.

“Will,” Hannibal said, reaching out a hand and pulling Will to him. He stared into Will’s eyes until Will felt himself calm down enough to stay put. And then Hannibal caressed his fingers in his hair, pulling him into a slow kiss.

Will had to pull away when he felt a hand—Anthony’s hand—pull at the sash of his robe. “Will,” Hannibal said, gaining his attention back. Looking at him with intense eyes, as if to say: stop worrying and let yourself enjoy this.

Will returned his hands to Hannibal, and found them eager to rid him of his suit. Meanwhile, Anthony was fast in manhandling him to his feet. He stood in between Hannibal’s legs, facing him, with Anthony behind him, busy with undressing. The robe dropped to his feet—he felt Hannibal admire his figure, looking at him with eyes full of lust as he sat back on the sofa.

“He really is quite beautiful,” Anthony remarked, snaking his hands around his chest and undoing the buttons on his front. Will ignored him, and bent again to finish undressing Hannibal—but he was stopped. “Let me look,” Hannibal said.

Will straightened, letting himself be displayed like a doll. It was humiliating, but it was arousing.

Finally his pants were pulled down to his feet. Will stepped out of them and stood naked, while Hannibal admired him with pure lust.

“Eager, despite the rough start,” Anthony chimed, running his hands down Will’s arms and peering at Will’s half-hard cock. “What are these scars?” Anthony questioned, peeking at the red puckering on the inside of Will’s forearms.

Will shivered, and his mind set only on Hannibal. He jerked out of Anthony’s grasp and kneeled, fingers fast on the one thing that he had been hungry for. Hannibal’s cock.

“Not so fast,” Hannibal said, leaning forward for another kiss. Will closed his eyes and let himself be carried away—until he felt Anthony’s mouth on his neck. Will pulled away, only to watch Hannibal transfer his mouth to Anthony’s. A jolt of jealousy ran through Will—he wanted to lunge at Anthony and bash his head in something solid. But instead he turned his mouth to Anthony when Hannibal pulled back. He moaned when he felt Hannibal’s mouth run down his neck—and then at his chest, tongue wet at his nipples. Eager hands reached down to grab fistfuls of Will’s ass. Will gasped, and then reached behind to let Hannibal know that he had a plug in him.

“I was not expecting this, Will.” Hannibal remarked, satisfied.

“I’m glad I can still surprise you,” Will replied.

“Did you two orchestrate this?” Anthony asked, in the process of undressing.

“Do you want to watch him fuck me?” Will whispered, undeniably aroused at the notion.

“Shall we move to the bedroom?” Hannibal offered, eyes glinting.

“Here is fine,” Will said. “Just need a condom and lube.”

Hannibal was fast—he was still fully dressed save for his jacket, and left Anthony and Will to themselves.

As soon as Will turned back to Anthony—finding him fully undressed now—he was overtaken with hungry kisses and an eager cock. Will slipped his hand down experimentally and felt at the organ. Muscle memory allowed him to work his hand so that he was stroking Anthony now. This wasn’t how he had imagined his night.

Hannibal returned and slipped his hands around Will, as if to assure him that he was nearby. Will looked back and received a kiss before being guided so that the plug could be taken out. Anthony settled on the sofa and eased on a condom, hungry eyes running back and forth between Hannibal and Will.

“Are you sure?” Hannibal whispered in Will’s ear, coating two fingers with lube and slipping them inside of Will.

“Oh—,” Will gasped. “Yes, I’m sure.” He moved towards Anthony and applied lube to his waiting cock, before turning around and facing Hannibal. “I want to do it like this,” he said, lifting his legs and settling against Anthony, so that his back was turned to Anthony.

“Very well,” Hannibal said, finally taking off his shirt.

Will watched Hannibal undress as Anthony nudged his cock around Will’s ass. “What a good boy you have, Hannibal,” Anthony said, penetrating Will.

Will gasped, aroused with how Hannibal was looking at him. He ground down, not allowing any teasing, and began moving to his own rhythm. Anthony’s hands dug into his sides. Will reached his hands out to Hannibal and pleaded with his eyes to please just give him what he wanted.

“Do you want it?” Hannibal asked, smirking. He was going to make Will suffer. Will nodded, though he knew that he was supposed to say so out loud.

“What do you want?” asked Hannibal, taking one step away; denying.

Will gulped. “I—” he began, the words catching in his throat. Hannibal waited patiently. “I—want your cock,” he said, finally.

“And what do you want to do with it?”

“I want it in my mouth. Please,” Will pleaded. “Please, I want it.”

Hannibal took pity, stepping forward. “Go on.”

Will almost toppled over as he took Hannibal’s cock in between his lips, and moaned. “Good boy,” Hannibal said, settling his hands into Will’s curls. He sucked eagerly, taking too much.

And then he was being moved onto his back onto the floor. With complete disregard to Hannibal, Anthony hovered over Will and spread his legs, roughly penetrating him again. Will almost wanted to kick him away—but here Hannibal was, cradling his head and leaning in for a kiss. Will reached down and sought Hannibal's cock, delighting at the familiarity of it. He moaned into Hannibal's mouth as Anthony fucked him, hard so that he could feel the carpet burn on his back.

"How about you ride me," Anthony suggested. "I'm rather close."

Will did as he was told to, moving to settle on top of Anthony. As he was penetrated again, he realised that this was his chance now—to do what he had been wanting to do.

He sensed Hannibal kneel behind him, ready for assistance.

He made a show of grinding himself down onto Anthony's cock, feeling a rush as finally, Anthony threw his head back in completion. Immediately, Will's fingers flew to Anthony's neck, as Hannibal's flew to Anthony's wrists to hold him down.

"Wha—," Anthony gagged, eyes cracking open to find that this wasn't sexual play. It was serious—as serious as death. He thrashed—or tried to. The adrenaline coursing through Will made him stronger: he tightened his fingers and watched Anthony struggle.

"Keep going, Will." Hannibal encouraged. "Almost there."

Will kept at it, excitement still brewing in his chest at the thought of Hannibal fucking him after Anthony drew his last breath. And at last, Anthony began to weaken—he twitched and gasped until he slowed down.

"My dear Will," Hannibal murmured in his ear, circling his hand around Will's still hard cock. "My dear Will."

"Fuck—fuck me. Fuck me just like this," Will urged, sticking his ass out to brush it against Hannibal's cock.

Hannibal nudged closer and guided his cock in.

Will almost came with just penetration—Hannibal's cock fit inside him so well. "God—it feels so good," Will gasped, and then for a second—he lost his nerve when he saw Anthony before him, going cold.

"Hannibal," Will called. "Turn me around, I want to see you."

Hannibal lifted him up, and carefully laid him down onto the sofa. Will wrapped his legs around Hannibal and held him close, feeling the weight of his passion drive into him. "Yes —" he gasped, hand snaking down to stroke himself. "Yes—yes," Yes, this was all that he had ever wanted. Someone who loved him—who understood him. Who looked at him like Hannibal was now—like he loved Will too. Whatever hardships that they had gone through over the past months—it didn't matter anymore.

Chapter End Notes

I think this story may be coming to an end soon.
I don't even know if it's good anymore, or if I'm dragging it too far.
Lemme know!

# Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Despite unsettling truths and doubts, Will begins to gain confidence.

Chapter Notes

Apologies for the big delay (is there anyone left who's reading this anymore...)
Also, some horny ghost possessed me so shield thine eyes if you don't do well with smut.
Plot? What plot? ;)

Fatigue should have rendered them useless, but Will was wide awake as he slumped back, staring with wonderment at Hannibal. Even with Anthony Dimmond's body lying dead near his feet—Will was surprised to find that his passion for Hannibal wasn't melting away. "What meal do you propose we make out of him?" Will prompted, slightly taken aback at himself for using the word *we* . Hannibal seemed to notice it too—his eyes sparkled, when he lifted his head up from where it was resting on Will's chest. After a moment of intense staring, Hannibal shifted his gaze to the dead man and hummed. "Sanguinaccio Dolce," Hannibal answered.

"What's that?" Will asked, burrowing his hands through Hannibal's hair.

"One of my favourite desserts," Hannibal said, pushing himself up on both elbows and gazing at Will. "A classic Italian dessert—a thick chocolate custard, traditionally made with pigs blood."

Will's face bloomed into a humorous smile. It was just so Hannibal-like to think of such a thing. The timing was oddly fitting too—Valentine's Day was just around the corner. "Blood and chocolate," Will said. "How very romantic of you."

Hannibal answered with a shy smile, as if he had expected Will not to have noticed. He reached out a hand and ran his knuckles against the side of Will's face. "Get some sleep. I will do the rest."

Will's mind immediately became thoughtful. "We're in this together," he answered. "I want to do it with you."

Hannibal returned him a look of apprehension.

“You’ve protected me from the gruesome parts of what we do,” Will continued. “Maybe I don’t need protecting. Let me help you…and you can teach me.”

“You’re willing to learn?”

“Yes,” Will said.

*

Sleep, it seemed, was far away. Winter’s dawn was slow to bring up the sun—the sky was still dark enough that it felt like the night was never-ending. Will didn’t mind that—it evoked a magical feeling, as if he was doing something very fun, and very wicked. Which, it was. He stood beside Hannibal in the pantry as he handed him ingredients to carry over to the kitchen.

“The sugar may seem excessive but we need it to match the saltiness of the blood,” Hannibal said, and then he looked at Will. “You chew your lips bloody sometimes with anxiety,”

Will nodded, recalling the savoury taste of blood.

“Now imagine that, with added sweetness.”

“I can feel my mouth watering,” Will said, smirking. He followed Hannibal’s directions as he measured the sugar, and watched it disappear in a pot of simmering milk. Next came the fresh blood that they had harvested—Will felt a smile creep on his face at his fascination with the dark blood-milk.

Next, Hannibal handed Will two bars of chocolate.

Will received it and smiled, feeling like a child. He snapped the bars audibly between his fingers and looked up to see a smile bloom on Hannibal’s face. “I like that sound,” Will said, watching as the chocolate darkened the steaming liquid in the pot.

“And now we keep stirring until the mixture becomes thick,” Hannibal said. Once that was achieved, Hannibal added a pinch of cinnamon and stirred.

“Would it barbaric to suggest that we eat it out of the pot?” Will said, half-joking—but wanting to see if Hannibal would allow him this. It was just too good of an opportunity to pass, the image of Hannibal setting aside proper table manners. He was also, he realised, chasing that feeling that came with doing something forbidden, or frowned upon. Like a child, snacking in the middle of the night.

Hannibal paused—but then, he was in a good mood. He seemed ready to do anything that Will suggested, and nodded.

Will grinned—and it felt good to show it. “I’ll grab the spoons.”

*

The night only seemed to get better. Instead of eating their Valentine’s chocolate on a proper table, they leaned back against the kitchen wall with the pot between them, placed on a heat-

proof mat.

“This is quite unexpected,” Hannibal mused, dipping his glinting spoon into the custard.

Will dipped his own spoon and held it up to observe the mousse’s rich colour. He casted Hannibal a glance, and let him watch as he made a show of consuming it. “Mmm,” Will said, closing his eyes. And in that moment, it seemed urgently important that he vocalise what he was feeling—or at least, to assess it. “Are you happy?” he asked, lowering his gaze to the pot and scooping out another mouthful.

A pause emanated from Hannibal. But his answer seemed honest—if cautious. “Yes,”

Will was somewhat surprised, though he didn’t know what he had been expecting as an answer.

“To have walked through life, unknown and unseen by everyone—” Hannibal said. “Until you.”

Will gulped, flattered yet—vulnerable. The old familiar feeling that he didn’t deserve Hannibal—that he didn’t deserve any of this. To divert that feeling, Will said: “Those you have killed have seen the real you. Your victims.”

“You are not my victim.”

Will nodded, apprehensive. “That, I’m not.”

“The difference lies in that you have seen me, *known* me.”

Will scoffed, playful, but feeling increasingly like the magical feeling that he had pursued was slipping away from him. He sucked at the spoon and kept it there, as if to stop himself from speaking anymore. Or as a signal that he didn’t want the subject to be discussed further.

Hannibal took another bite—seemed to savour it, and then prompted: “Would you like to discuss our evening?”

Will shrugged. “It isn’t particularly bothering me, if that’s what you mean.”

Hannibal paused and then nodded, as if in surprise. “How far we have come, Will.”

It was true—once, Will had been so stubborn, but now he was cooking beside Hannibal. But as he tended to do, his mind stirred into worry. If his stubbornness to adapt to their lifestyle was part of what had attracted Hannibal to Will—if Will was becoming more comfortable regarding what they did—what was it going to be like now? “You’re searching for signs of doubt. But I enjoyed it.” Will said, smiling. “Particularly the sex.”

“I am pleased with you, Will. At how open you’re allowing yourself to be.” Hannibal said. “If I may be so open too—” Hannibal placed his spoon down. “I feel my love for you has reached new heights.”

Will raised his brows, surprised. He smiled, twirling his spoon in his fingers. A new idea appeared in his mind, a plan that would benefit the both of them. “To be honest, I wasn’t completely aware up until I met you that sex could be a way to express love.” he said. “With you it feels—like…like it’s not a chore, you know? Like it’s sacred. If that makes sense.”

“A way to give power to someone, while at the same time having power over that someone.”

Will nodded. “It’s not just the body, but the mind too.”

“I wonder how far I can push you—and in return how far you can push me. I would like to watch you enjoy things you’ve never even thought of enjoying.”

Will smiled, feeling a coil of arousal stab him in the gut. “I’m stronger than I think I am. That’s what I’ve discovered about myself with you.”

“Yes, you have shown great resilience in your body. And your mind—”

“Sometimes I think that you only strive to break my mind.” Will interrupted.

“On the contrary I would say that I am nurturing it. And what I do or don’t do for you—it is all out of love, Will.”

Will considered, turning Hannibal’s words over in his mind.

“There was once a time when you were so very reluctant—and blind to who you are, Will.”

“The things you’ve done have allowed me to be comfortable in my own skin,” Will replied. “I’ve killed—just as you have killed.”

“You and I—we were alone, but now we are not, together.” Hannibal said. “We were destined to be.”

“We’re lucky we love each other.” Will said. “Imagine if it was otherwise. If you were considering killing me.”

There was no answer needed for this, for the answer was apparent in Hannibal’s eyes, and in the way that he smiled.

Will smiled back.

“And you, Will? Are you happy?” Hannibal asked.

Will’s hand didn’t still—but his face had, judging by how closely Hannibal was looking at him.

“Tell the truth. Be honest, Will.” Hannibal encouraged.

Will tried to smile, and shrugged. “After all, honesty is all you’ve given me.” He said. “I am happy. But truth be told, I know no other alternative to this life now, and…I wonder whether I’ve adapted to it so well that I’ve tricked myself into feeling this way.”

Hannibal looked on, pondering.

“I don’t feel like your victim…but I do remember a time when I came close to feeling like one. You’re a psychiatrist—you know what Stockholm Syndrome is. What if that is exactly what had happened to me, and I’m not aware of it? What if none of this…this love that we feel for each other, is true? What if we’ve warped and distorted each other so much that all we know now is to act this way?”

Something like a trickling of fear ran through Will’s entire body as he realised just how much he had spoken.

“In what way are we acting?” Hannibal challenged.

It was a moment before Will could answer. He waved his hand around and shrugged. “Killing and eating people…and thinking that this is what brings us closer.”

“But does it not make you feel closer to me?” Hannibal asked, pensive and non-threatening.

Will didn’t even need to think about it, but he hesitated to admit it. He gave a weak nod to Hannibal.

“Do you question my love for you?” Hannibal pressed on.

Will shook his head. He didn’t know what else to do. To question Hannibal’s love would be akin to questioning everything. He simply couldn’t admit to something so big.

“I know that my love for you is real—” Hannibal stated. “because otherwise, I would have killed you by now.” And, as if to add to the drama, he pushed the pot aside and reached out his arm around Will, drawing him close. Will shuddered as he drew out a breath, and nodded, as if to show that Hannibal’s words hadn’t gone unheard. It was also an astonishing thing—that Will had managed to hypnotise a sadistic psychopath into falling for him.

“And you are not my hostage,” Hannibal continued.

Weakly, Will answered: “I was, once. I don’t feel like your hostage now, but,” he exhaled, nervous. “I have a feeling that you wouldn’t let me leave,”

“Ask my permission, then.” Hannibal said, a surprising answer.

Will paused and thought. The thing was, he didn’t *want* to go outside. It was as if Hannibal had somehow—without even trying—managed to instil in Will a fear of going outside, to be seen by anyone other than Hannibal. “You and I both know that I’m no longer able to go outside,” Will admitted.

“Is that something you would like to improve on?”

Will shook his head. “At least, not for the time being.”

Hannibal’s hand squeezed as if in comfort.

“I guess I’m happy right where I am,” Will said, in a low voice.

Hannibal offered him an uneasy smile, and then drew him closer. “Come here,” he said, pulling on Will’s arm. Will hitched himself up and dragged himself until he was facing Hannibal, legs straddling Hannibal’s hips. Everything—every word that they had uttered to each other, seemed to melt away as Hannibal’s arms came around to hold him. Will circled his own around Hannibal’s neck and joined his cheek against Hannibal’s. Together, wordlessly, they rocked to and fro—and it was hard not to admit that Will was feeling close to what he thought peace felt like.

*

After Anthony Dimmond’s death, something in Will began to shift, as if he could see more clearly now, the potential that he had to live the kind of life that Hannibal lived. He began paying attention to the times when Hannibal would leave the house, to run errands to ensure that they didn’t get caught.

“You’re one step ahead of everyone, aren’t you?” Will said, as he stood, dressed up for a photograph for his forged passport.

“Doesn’t hurt to be too cautious,” Hannibal replied, pinching at Will’s tie for the umpteenth time.

Those words had lodged themselves in Will’s mind—because it was true. You could never be too prepared. Will felt his hands reaching less for things like his fishing lures and whatnot, and more to Hannibal’s medical books. He wasn’t entirely uneducated—but he had never actually treated a genuine wound. What if Hannibal was to be injured and Will had no way of helping him? He began practicing stitching on rags until Hannibal caught him and provided him with the appropriate supplies.

And then Hannibal provided him a full list of all his properties in the world, and where to go and what to do in case the worst happened. Will’s head swam with the information—surely he was too inept at navigating his way around if Hannibal wasn’t by his side. “You’re too modest, Will. You used to work with the FBI, remember.” Hannibal reminded him. “You can do anything.”

What was so unexpected—and touching—was that Hannibal was trusting him with everything that he had; while there was nothing that Will could offer as his own—and he told Hannibal this.

“You are all that I want,” Hannibal replied. “and need.”

*

It was one of those nights when Will was to go to bed alone, without Hannibal by his side. Will was, by now, very trusting of when Hannibal informed him that he was going to be working late. Whether ‘work’ meant actual work or something else, Will didn’t find it in himself to press Hannibal. He ate and showered, and then read himself to sleep.

It wasn't until Will shook awake, to find himself on his stomach, hands tied behind his back, with something soft but constricting. Hannibal's silk tie.

"Hannibal?" Will asked, emerging from the haze of sleep. A few seconds trudged by as Will listened to the sound of clothes being shrugged off. Will tried to hoist himself up but found his limbs still numb with sleep. Would Hannibal bring back a stranger again into their house and set him on Will like this? The room was dark—and panic came creeping in as the suspense was prolonged. "Hannibal?" Will asked again. Will tried to crane his head back to see when suddenly, he felt hands grasp at the waistband of his boxers and pull them away. And then he felt the sure heat of Hannibal's body flush against his own. Wordlessly, Hannibal's mouth hungrily kissed at his neck, hands moving to take in the feel of Will's skin. "Are you excited, Will?" Hannibal whispered, voice growling with arousal. Goosebumps flooded across Will's skin at the sound of Hannibal's voice, so close to his ear. Panic began to recede quickly. "Will you indulge me?" Hannibal asked.

How could Will possibly deny him? "My body is yours to do as you please," Will answered, before he could think to keep those words to himself.

"Is that so?" Hannibal mused, a playful tone in his voice. He planted wet, open-mouthed kisses down Will's spine, pausing to suck patches of skin, leaving bruises behind. Will could feel the thrilling sharpness of Hannibal's teeth. He pressed his hips against the sheets, hoping to find some relief. Will felt the wet tip of Hannibal's cock poke him on one of his calves, and smiled to himself as he imagined Hannibal coming all over his back. Hannibal lifted away his mouth then, and grabbed handfuls of Will's ass with both hands, greedy and possessive. A thumb dipped in to caress in between—Will jolted with worry about Hannibal's intentions. He wasn't prepped. Would Hannibal have his way with him as he pleased? Will waited anxiously, about to question when he gasped in surprised as Hannibal leaned down, running his tongue against Will's ass. "Wait—" Will whispered, his voice small, as arousal heightened again at the feel of Hannibal's day-old stubble against his skin. Will moaned softly, gaining more enthusiasm from Hannibal. The sound of his wet mouth was obscenely arousing—Will felt his erection return full-force.

Hannibal wouldn't possibly fuck him without prepping him first, Will thought. He jolted in worry as Hannibal crawled closer as if readying himself for penetration. "Hannibal—" Will called out. He wasn't sure if he could take Hannibal like this.

"Worry not," Hannibal answered, reaching across to the drawer and retrieving, unmistakably, a bottle of lube. "I would never hurt you, Will."

Will relaxed. He heard the sound of Hannibal lubricating his cock, and then shockingly, he felt Hannibal's slick hand coating the inside of his thighs. "Fold your knees," Hannibal said. "Bring your thighs together."

Will understood what was happening, then. He pushed up on his knees and did as he was told. And then he felt Hannibal's cock penetrate the slick space between his thighs. Will heard Hannibal sigh with pleasure. He slid in and out slowly, both hands digging in at Will's hips. Will swayed from arousal himself, his own cock dangling hard in the air, begging to be touched.

“Do you like this, Will?” Hannibal said, increasing his pace.

“Yes,” Will replied immediately. He gasped loudly as Hannibal’s cock jutted sharply against his own cock. Will was writhing with tension—on the brink of achieving climax—but clearly having no means to it.

“Hannibal—” Will called out. “I need to touch, please.”

Hannibal hoisted Will up to press him flush against himself, one arm braced across his torso while the other moved to circle around Will’s cock.

“Thank you,” Will groaned, as Hannibal jerked him and thrusted into his thighs. Will wondered later on, how had they kept balanced, kneeling on the bed like that.

“I can’t—hold it much longer,” Will said, urgently.

“Show me, then.” Hannibal said, his own thrusts clearly nearing orgasm. With Hannibal’s permission, Will cried out and spilled all over the sheets. Hannibal held his body tight as he slapped against it—until Will heard him come, spilling audibly on top of where Will had come. He pulled his cock away, and then undid the binding on Will’s wrists. Once free, Will slumped down and rubbed his wrists as Hannibal moved to turn on the lamp.

“I will have to change the sheets,” Hannibal said, turning to look at Will.

Will looked up and nodded, feeling strange after what they had done in the dark. Hannibal was watching him with an intensity—as if he was in awe. Will managed a shy smile.

“You look beautiful, my love.” Hannibal said, moving closer to place a hand under Will’s chin. Will lowered his eyes, always uncomfortable with compliments. When he looked up again, Hannibal was smiling—and then he bent down and planted a kiss onto Will’s lips.

*

The night when Hannibal had surprised Will lingered on his mind to the point that he wanted to do the same to Hannibal. Will wanted to surprise him. His thoughts led him down to the secret basement, where Hannibal kept all his various tools and equipment for his hunts. Machineries and devices Will could not look at without feeling a trickle of fear creep up his spine. This was also the place where Will had killed Freddie Lounds. And further down—the room that had once been his place of captivity.

But Will was after something simple. He was looking for rope.

Surely a serial killer as notorious as the Chesapeake Ripper had some old-fashioned rope down here?

Despite the adventurous nature of Will’s search for simple rope, Will was reminded of how far he had come. How much he had adapted to be content with the way that he lived now. He looked around at the various tools of torture and butchering, and recalled how once, he hadn’t even been allowed to go near a knife. Now he was being trusted with everything that Hannibal owned.

Before he could let his thoughts get the better of him, Will hugged the bundle of rope close to his chest, cast a final look around the basement, and ran up the stairs.

*

Hannibal was reading in bed as Will showered. He had worked on his surprise for a few days in secret, and had hidden it under his pillow to present it to Hannibal. He pulled a T-shirt over his head and slid on boxers, and then walked slowly to bed, trying to gauge if Hannibal would be in the mood. Hannibal cast him a smile as he watched Will slide into bed, but nothing more.

Slowly, Will slid his fingers beneath his pillow and withdrew the whip and placed it on Hannibal's lap. Instantly, Hannibal lowered his book, speechless. He stared at the Cat o' nine tails and then held shut the book in his hand.

"What do you think?" Will asked, swallowing a lump in his throat.

A smile crept up on Hannibal's lips, a mixture of surprise and anticipation. His hand moved to grip the short handle and then lifted to let the ends unfurl. Seeing it in Hannibal hand made it look more sinister, as if it was glaring at Will. He had twisted the cords so tightly that they shone—Will wondered now, seriously, if he had gone a little too far. He sensed something like dread coil in his gut. "Yes, you are quite good with your hands." Hannibal remarked. "Your craftsmanship is astounding."

Will gave Hannibal a forced, playful smile. "Yes, but…"

Hannibal looked back and smiled, feigning ignorance. He tilted his head as if to question what Will was talking about.

Will huffed, and shifted closer to Hannibal. "Are you gonna beat me with it or not?"

Hannibal hummed as if in satisfaction and laid a hand on Will's knee, rubbing. "And what have you done to deserve such a punishment?"

"I don't *need* to do anything," Will said. "You know that."

"Your penchant for pain is quite fascinating," Hannibal said, straightening to face Will. "Why do you need to feel pain, Will?" he asked, reaching out a hand to lay it on Will's throat, and then snaking it into Will's T-shirt to run it over his bare chest. The pads of his fingers rubbed over a nipple.

Will sighed with eyes closed. "I like giving myself over to you," he answered. "I like taking what you give me."

Hannibal's eyes were glossy with obvious want. He smiled and leaned closer to kiss the side of Will's neck. Before Will could think to touch Hannibal, he had moved away and was now standing by the bed. "Come here," he demanded.

Will went obediently, painfully aware of his erection jutting out. He stood facing Hannibal, awaiting further instructions. Hannibal stepped closer and looked at Will with a deep gaze.

“You have managed to surprise me, Will.” He said—and the affection in his voice was so clear that Will felt dizzy, ready to topple over. He licked his lips—and this action spurred Hannibal into ravenously kissing him. When Hannibal pulled back, it was sharp and sudden. “Now bend over.” he demanded, motioning to the bed.

Will did as he was told, skin buzzing with anticipation. He stifled a moan when Hannibal took hold of his waistband and slid them down sharply, to bunch around his thighs. He felt the whip being dangled so that the cords brushed delicately against the bare and unblemished skin of Will’s ass. A shiver ran through Will’s body.

“How many do you think you can take?” Hannibal asked—and without warning, made the first lash.

“Fuck!” Will cried out, the pain hot and stinging.

“How was that?” Hannibal asked, a playful tone in his voice. He was definitely enjoying it.

Will nodded in affirmation, as if his input mattered. He wanted to take whatever Hannibal gave him, and if he wanted to give Will greater pain—then so be it. He would take it.

“Do you think that you can take nine more?” Hannibal asked—his voice was loving; coaxing.

“Yes,” Will answered, though he was unsure—but definitely excited. “I can take it.”

“Good,” Hannibal said, straightening.

Will felt the second slash against the same tender spot and almost cursed out loud again.

Hannibal rubbed the reddened skin with his hand. “Count.” He demanded.

He bit down on his lip. “Three,” he huffed. It felt good—he stifled a moan as Hannibal started again. After the fourth one—as he was starting to get used to it—he felt the familiar high take over his brain, until he was foggy. Until he could feel the undeniable warmth in his groin.

“Five,” Will whispered, shaking, wanting to press his cock into the mattress.

Hannibal’s hand rubbed lovingly on Will’s ass. “Roman Catholics in the thirteenth century used to flog themselves as a way to cleanse oneself of their sins,” Hannibal said, always so apt with his information.

It made sense, what Hannibal was saying. He wanted to be rid of the feelings that he had once had for Hannibal—when he used to be so stubborn. He wanted to shed that poisonous past—hoped that he would feel a sense of purification wash over him, when the last strike was made.

“More,” Will begged. “Please.”

Hannibal cracked the whip in quick successions, prolonging the pain. Will felt like he was floating. He had forgotten to count. He bunched the sheets in his hands and clenched his teeth

tight, tears falling unbidden from his eyes. The force of the pain had knocked every thought out of his head: all he wanted right now was to feel more pain, so that he could be cleansed.

“Do you want more?” Hannibal asked, peering to look at Will. He reached a hand and caressed the hair away so that he could look Will in the eyes.

“Yes,” Will answered, looking back helplessly. “Please,”

“How many more?” Hannibal asked, affectionate.

“Five.” Will answered. “Please hurt me,” he pleaded. *I want you to feel powerful. I want you to be completely sure that I’m yours to do as you please. That I would never run away from you.*

“Very well.” Hannibal answered, and then cracked the whip hard. He didn’t stop to give Will a break, but made one lash after the another.

Will cried out and jolted with each lash, sure that his skin had broken. His knees were wobbly, and tears were running down his face—but he felt pure now, rubbed raw and clean.

“Shh…” Hannibal said, rubbing a loving hand on Will’s back. “It’s over.”

When Will turned his face, Hannibal was there to kiss him. He started timidly but turned violent—felt his blood rise again, opened his mouth to Hannibal and allowed Hannibal to lick inside his mouth.

His ass was sore and hurting—and it was hard not to think about that, but he still wanted to give Hannibal more. “I want to please you,” Will pleaded, snaking a hand down to press against Hannibal’s erection. “Use me,” Will said.

Just as he had uttered those words, he found himself on his back with Hannibal kneeling over his face, his mouth invaded harshly by Hannibal’s cock. Will sucked enthusiastically, not recognising himself. His own hands snaked down to his erection, stroking himself with both hands while Hannibal used his mouth.

Will moaned against Hannibal’s cock in his mouth—and then Hannibal took hold of Will’s head with both hands—fucking his mouth until Will felt warmth spill inside his mouth. It was enough to bring Will to climax—his body shook as he came, spilling all over his T-shirt.

*

Hannibal slumped down beside Will, both of them trying to catch their breath. After a moment, Will felt his senses returning—his mind trying to ready itself into thinking about what he had just done. He jerked his head up when he realised that Hannibal had gone to retrieve a warm towel to clean the mess on his stomach. “Thank you,” he said, blankly.

Hannibal lifted his eyes, obviously wary of Will’s mood. He turned to return the towel and then came back with medical supplies.

“Turn over, Will.” Hannibal said, and then helped Will take off his boxers.

Will folded his arms under his chin, unable to stop the brooding.

“What’s on your mind, Will?” Hannibal spoke. He rubbed a soothing balm over Will’s ass.

“Why am I the way that I am?” Will said—not really a question. He felt tears start to sting at his eyes—not tears of elation and physical pain, but tears of guilt.

“Are you feeling guilt over the things that you want?”

“I know it’s common to think that way—to be ashamed, or feel guilt.”

“You are coming down from a high,” Hannibal said. “You are feeling very unsure and lost after what we have just done. The intensity of submitting has vanished, and now you feel unsure of yourself.”

Will nodded, feeling embarrassed.

“I should have seen this coming,” Hannibal said.

Will felt tears escape from the corner of his eyes. He turned his face away so that Hannibal couldn’t see. What had he ever done to deserve Hannibal?

“Would you like to be held?” Hannibal asked, cautious. “Some people find it helpful to be left alone.”

Will thought it over, unsure of what he wanted. When enough time had passed without his answer, Hannibal shifted closer and pulled his boxers back on. And then he laid down next to Will and pulled him to lay flush on top of him. Will curled his arms against Hannibal’s chest as Hannibal circled his around Will’s waist, taking care to not touch his ass. “I’m here, Will.” Hannibal said. “And I couldn’t be more in awe of you,” he whispered, drawing up the sheets over them. “Whatever doubts you harbour, know that I’m here to listen to them.” Hannibal continued.

Soon, the jumbled thoughts in Will’s head began to quieten—and then he fell asleep just like that, on Hannibal’s chest, safe and contained.

*

Will woke with his face still planted against Hannibal’s chest. After a moment, he realised that Hannibal was awake, and stroking the back of his head—fingers entangled in his curls. Before Will could think about the night before—and his strange reaction—Hannibal spoke: “Time for a trim, don’t you think?”

Will pushed himself up and regarded Hannibal, searching for what—he didn’t know.

“Your hair has grown long,”

Will nodded—and realised what this was. Hannibal was giving him something to think about instead, some task to accomplish for the following hours, so that he wouldn’t brood and think himself to death. He smiled at Hannibal to let him know that he appreciated it.

“After breakfast, of course.” Hannibal said, hand shifting to caress at Will’s face.

Will hoisted himself up to get out of bed, but buckled under sudden pain. He clenched his teeth and bore it, unable to meet Hannibal’s eyes. When Hannibal moved to help him, Will shook his head and walked shakily to the bathroom. He didn’t know why he was doing it—did he want to show Hannibal that he was perfectly capable of bearing pain? Or was it resentment that Hannibal had done this to him? He washed his face and tried not to look at it in the mirror—even his own eyes were too hard to meet. If he had liked it—orchestrated the whole thing, then why was he feeling ashamed? Will grimaced—he knew these thoughts would lead him nowhere, so he hobbled into the kitchen, to see Hannibal flipping pancakes. Feeling guilty, he approached Hannibal and circled his arms around his middle, as if in an apology. “Smells great,” he said.

Hannibal’s hand came to stroke his in an answer. Will stood like that until it was absolutely necessary that he move. Finally, Hannibal gently turned around. “Do you think that you can sit?”

Will nodded, but unsure.

“We can eat here standing up, if you’d like,” Hannibal offered.

Will shook his head. “We’re not barbarians,” he joked.

Hannibal gave him a playful look and then nodded.

*

Will sat on an amply cushioned chair as Hannibal fussed around him, trying to brush his hair.

“Just wing it,” Will said, as he always did when Hannibal cut his hair. But Hannibal rarely winged anything, so he sat and bore the fuss.

“Would you like to talk about last night?” Hannibal spoke.

“What about it should we talk about?” Will shot back.

“Your reaction, for one.” Hannibal said. “It looked like a depressive episode.”

“I think it’s just something to do with brain chemistry,” Will said. “You know that.”

“What did it feel like?”

Will shrugged. “Like…I’m a needy little fuckup.” he replied, keeping his eyes closed. “Insecure.”

Hannibal’s fingers caressed his neck, grounding him. “We must try to prevent these thoughts.” he said. “You know how much I love you, Will.” He came around and bent down, levelling himself to Will.

Will opened his eyes. “I know.”

“And if you need to be reassured—there is nothing wrong with that. Did it help, being held?”

Will nodded—it was true. Hannibal knew what to do, and this was a testament to how much Hannibal knew him.

“Then we will resort to that if you exhibit signs of feeling depressed again.”

“I would like to make one thing clear,” Will said.

“Yes?”

“I enjoyed it. The…whipping. And…I’ve been enjoying the things that we do.”

Hannibal smiled, though he still seemed a little unsure if he had pushed Will too far.

“Did you enjoy it?” Will asked.

“Yes. Immensely.” Hannibal said. He twirled a strand of hair near Will’s jaw and snipped it. “You knew exactly what I would like.”

Will smiled—pride creeped up inside his chest. “Turns me on to see you like that.”

“See me like what?”

“In control.” Will replied. “Using me like that.”

Hannibal hummed. The haircut was done, but he was lingering—enjoying Will talk so openly.

“What do you think we should try next?”

“I think we should pace ourselves, Will.” Hannibal replied, setting the scissors aside.

“I want you to humiliate me,” Will said, dead-pan. “I think I’d really like that.”

“Will.” Hannibal said, trying to look stern—but Will could see that he was partial to the idea.

“Surprise me, Hannibal.”

# Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

There was note waiting on the kitchen counter when Will woke up to make himself breakfast. Hannibal had left early, and would be coming home earlier than usual. It also said that Will was to be waiting for Hannibal at 6pm in their bedroom, naked and prepped for anal penetration. Despite the mystery of the request, Will felt excitement bubble up inside of him.

Will happily followed the instructions; maybe a little too happily. Several times throughout the day, he'd find himself aroused and would have to distract himself with something dull.

When the time came, Will laid himself out and waited in their bed with nothing on—not even attempting to hide himself under the sheets, to soften the shame that came with being so openly displayed. It must have been a good move because when Hannibal finally entered the room, he seemed immensely pleased.

"Hello, Will." Hannibal said, talking slow steps into the room—hands behind his back, as if he was hiding something.

"Hello, doctor." Will smiled, nervous but happy to see Hannibal. "What have you got there?"

Hannibal approached, a secretive smile on his face; and stood for a moment, just taking in Will's naked form.

"You're making me nervous," Will said.

Hannibal merely kept smiling.

"And maybe that's your intention."

"My intention?" Hannibal chuckled, meeting Will's eyes. He flicked his chin towards the floor. "Come kneel down."

Unquestioningly, Will flung himself off of the bed and kneeled, looking up at Hannibal from under his lashes, for maximum effect.

Hannibal made a pleasing sound and extended a hand from behind him, and pushed it into the curls on the top of Will's head. He fisted his hand tightly until Will felt a sharp pain, which undeniably made him insanely aroused. He tried not to show it too much.

Hannibal then presented his other hand, in which was a leather collar—the kind that was for humans, not dogs. "What do you think?" Hannibal asked, so genuinely that Will immediately consented to it. He nodded eagerly and closed his eyes in elation as Hannibal bent down close to him and secured the collar snug around his neck. Immediately, Will felt a buzzing across his skin at the feel of being constricted.

“Very good,” Hannibal said, patting Will’s head lovingly. “Wait for me on all fours now,”

Will obeyed, laying his hands flat on the floor. He watched in a mixture of suspense and anticipation as Hannibal took his leave. Minutes passed—Will knew that this was part of Hannibal’s design: to make Will anxious, to make his limbs strain with pain and exhaustion. And if Will was to disobey Hannibal’s orders—then there were going to be consequences. Will shut his eyes and tried to think of something other than the way that his hands and feet were already numbing. He tried to think of his reward, which was Hannibal’s hands on his skin.

Twenty minutes or so must have passed. Will looked up in surprise as Hannibal came to stand before him, and then bent down to placed two bowls in front of him. Will stared at them in a kind of shock—so he was to be humiliated by being treated like a dog. There was a kind of a mush in the bowl, clearly edible for humans—but very similar to dog food. The other contained plain water. Will looked up at Hannibal as if simultaneously questioning him on why he would put Will through something so degrading as this—but also waiting for his permission to eat.

“Eat,” Hannibal commanded, a smug smile on his face.

It was a moment before Will could make himself do it. He bent down and scooped a small morsel into mouth and began chewing, cheeks flushed. Hannibal stooped down and balanced himself on his heels and watched with keen eyes. He put a hand on Will’s head and patted gently. “Good boy,”

Will felt himself harden at the praise. No doubt that had been Hannibal’s intention. He tried to focus on chewing and clutched his hands into balls.

Hannibal bent down and grabbed a little bit of food into his palm, and held it out for Will to eat. After a moment of consideration, Will leaned close and picked up the morsel. He licked the hand clean, proud of his work.

Hannibal patted him again on the head. “Such an obedient boy,” he cooed.

Will smiled in spite of the humiliation—it felt good to please Hannibal, no matter what the means.

“Finish your food,” Hannibal said, and rose.

There was only a mouthful left. Will scooped it into his mouth and then took careful sips from the water bowl. He heard Hannibal settle himself onto the edge of the bed behind him, clearly so that he could stare at Will’s ass, who was in such a vulnerable position. Will felt the anal plug being tugged out of him—and uncomfortable as that was, he was also grateful when Hannibal’s tongue replaced the space. Will moaned openly, aware of his complete submission to Hannibal. “Thank you—” Will whispered, unbidden.

“This excites you, doesn’t it?” Hannibal said, pulling away. “Being treated like a dog.” And then Hannibal reached down and grabbed at Will’s balls in an almost painful hold, as if to further demonstrate his power.

Will groaned, ashamed and excited. “Yes,”

Hannibal let go and retrieved lube from the drawer, and then slid a finger inside of Will. When he seemed to be satisfied, he rose and came to stand in front of Will. Will looked up, puzzled—and then saw a leash in Hannibal’s hands. Despite having been denied pleasure and relief for what felt like quite a stretch of time, Will still felt excited at the notion of being led around on all fours. Hannibal latched the hook onto Will’s collar and tugged, until Will was pulled up on his knees. He walked forward until he plastered his hands to Hannibal’s thighs, his face almost touching Hannibal’s erection. Will looked at it with a hunger—he wanted it so bad, he was practically drooling. And then thankfully, Hannibal tugged at the leash until Will’s face was pressed into the wool of Hannibal’s trousers. Will moaned in pleasure, moving his face against the hard length, rubbing his lips against where it was most pleasurable for Hannibal: the tip. Hannibal grunted, and then reached down to cup the back of Will’s head to shove it harder against himself.

“Please,” Will begged, clutching at Hannibal’s belt. “May I?”

Hannibal nodded—Will was glad to know that his face was also flushed. He hurried his fingers and lowered both pants and underwear, until Hannibal’s cock jutted forward and slapped him on the cheek. “Yes,” Will gasped, taking hold of Hannibal’s cock, and pressing his face into it. He wanted to smother himself with it, to leave its scent on his face, to fill his mouth until it was all that he knew. Hannibal groaned, and then took hold of his cock, to forcefully rub it harder into Will’s face. Will moaned, aching between his legs. His hand shot out to stroke himself when Hannibal slapped his cock onto Will’s cheek.

“Not yet,” Hannibal warned.

Will obeyed, although a little reluctant.

Hannibal pulled up his pants and tugged on the leash. “On the bed,” he said.

Will went crawling, and stayed on hands and knees as Hannibal undressed himself.

“Tell me what you want, Will.” Hannibal said, finally coming to kneel behind Will. His hands skimmed broadly over Will’s ass.

“I want you to fuck me,” Will replied, shameless now. His cock was throbbing, and frankly, he couldn’t wait much longer. “I’ve been good, haven’t I?”

“Oh yes,” Hannibal said, two fingers pushing into Will. “And a good boy deserves a reward,”

Will almost buckled from the words. “Please,” he begged. “I need you.”

Hannibal retrieved the lube and coated his cock. And then he gently squeezed it into Will.

“Oh god,” Will gasped. He had waited so long—and it was going so slow. “Harder.”

A hard slap landed on Will’s ass. “Do not tell me what to do, pet.” Hannibal warned.

Will gasped. “Yes. Whatever you want,” Will answered. He could feel Hannibal pushing in, until he was filled to the hilt. Will squirmed when Hannibal stayed put.

“Do you feel me stretching you?” Hannibal asked.

Will trembled, nodding. “It feels so good,”

“Feels good to be used?”

“Fuck yes,”

Hannibal pulled out and then slammed back in, hard. Will cried out, from the spark of pleasure that was given him, and from feeling impatient with not being able to do anything more for himself. “Please fuck me,” Will whispered. “Fuck me like you own me,”

Hannibal groaned and began thrusting hard, unable to pretend that the words weren’t having an enormous effect on him.

Hannibal took hold of the leash and wound it around his hand, tugging it towards himself so that Will’s body was forced to lean back, up on his knees. The collar squeezed around his throat deliciously, making his breaths heavier.

Hannibal pulled out completely and slapped his wet cock against Will’s hole, making him whine. “How much do you want it?”

“Hannibal—” Will choked. “I need it. I need you. Please, I’m yours—”

Hannibal slammed into him, his skin audibly slapping as he began moving. “I’m yours to do as you please,” Will urged, as Hannibal neared climax.

Will was trembling; on the verge of coming—but Hannibal slapped his hand away and turned him over like he was a rag doll. Will landed on his back with legs open, dragged towards Hannibal. A finger slid into him, curved upwards. Will bit his lip, curling his toes for what was going to happen. Hannibal was intending to make him come by massaging his prostate, which Will was less enthusiastic about in hindsight, since he always seemed to barely contain himself when it happened. Hannibal leaned over him now—his handsome face flushed; a hand planted on the bed by Will’s side. Will set his hands on Hannibal, sliding them over the skin of his arms; of his face. When eye-contact became too much, he leaned up for a kiss—which Hannibal allowed, but only to an extent. Will moaned open-mouthed as he felt himself about to approach his climax. He squeezed Hannibal’s arm, for an anchor, as his body began to lose control.

“You may touch yourself,” Hannibal encouraged.

Will didn’t even hear him—what he felt then was Hannibal’s other hand circling around his cock, startling him. Hannibal leaned over his hand and dribbled saliva onto it.

“I’m—so close,” Will gasped.

Hannibal smile was wicked as he increased his pace—and just like that, Will began spilling out. His body jerked away from Hannibal's fingers inside him, overwhelmed with pleasure. But Hannibal seized his knees together and held him in place, intent on milking Will until the last drop was squeezed out. "Good boy," Hannibal said.

Another spasm of pleasure ripped out of Will. He cried out, voice dried and rasping.

Finally, when Will came to, he found that Hannibal was gently licking away the come on his belly. Will closed his eyes and let himself be cared for. He might have fallen asleep for a few minutes because when he woke up, the collar was gone and his body was being wiped clean by a warm towel. And then, despite the heat of their bodies—Hannibal pulled him onto his chest and caressed his hair. "My beautiful Will," he whispered, kissing Will on the temple.

Will lifted his head and looked at Hannibal, with an overwhelming sense of gratitude. This time, the sense of feeling like he would crumble if Hannibal didn't hold him was kept at bay. He knew that this part of intimacy was somewhat inherent, but at least he had succeeded in not succumbing to it immediately after climax. Having been denied kisses earlier, Will leaned in and took his fill, greedy—and even feeling like he was taking advantage—when Hannibal was so adamant on aftercare. Will straddled Hannibal properly and lifted his body slightly so that he could hover over Hannibal and kiss him properly. All the while, he felt Hannibal's hands graze over his skin, touching him with a lightness as if he were precious—but also with enough pressure so that he felt like he was wanted.

When Will finally pulled away, he had to smile at the reddened lips that he had just sucked.

Hannibal smiled back, a besotted look in his eyes. "Even when I have had my fill of you, Will," he said, slowly. "I still feel hungry for you."

Will laughed nervously, unbelieving still, of Hannibal's desire for him. Something that he had thought too dangerous to entertain passed through his mind. Yes, Hannibal was a cannibal, and so was he. Making love; performing acts of love; taking each other into their mouths, was the extent to which Will thought was acceptable in terms of cannibalising each other. But now, seeing Hannibal's hunger for him; seeing how he smile openly and showed his sharp teeth…Will let the thought grow.

"Your teeth are fascinating," Will said. "When I first saw you truly laugh…I couldn't help but wonder what it would feel like, to have your teeth against my skin."

"I have bitten you plenty of times," Hannibal pointed out. Yes—he had, often. On his neck, as if he were a vampire sucking the life out of Will. Or his shoulders—or the inside of his thighs, where the muscles were unblemished and supple. To the point of pain.

"But not to the point of drawing blood," Will said.

Hannibal observed Will for a moment—he did this often, as if trying to see if they could communicate without words. But more often than not, Hannibal liked to hear Will speak his desires out loud.

“What are you asking of me?” he said, a corner of his mouth tilted in a devious hint of amusement.

Will tried to mirror that smile, hot excitement bubbling in his gut. “To engage yourself in savagery,” he replied, trailing a finger across Hannibal’s lower lip.

Hannibal’s nostrils flared as his eyes sizzled with intent. “Isn’t that what we did, just now?”

Will tilted his head. “I want you to taste my blood—I know you imagine doing it.”

It was dangerous, and unsanitary. But Will wanted it. Wanted to see Hannibal lose control in this way, to indulge himself in his predatory behaviour.

“Here,” Will said, offering his forearm.

Hannibal pondered a moment, and then straightened so he was sitting up. After a moment more, he took Will’s forearm in both hands, cradling it gently—staring at the milky skin. Thinking—maybe trying to sway himself away.

“Please?” Will said, urgent.

Hannibal licked his lips, and then his eyes seemed to go black. He leaned down and clamped his teeth shut onto the skin, unhesitant.

Will hissed, tried to keep from pulling his arm away—Hannibal had given him no time to adjust to the pain. He realised now that Hannibal wouldn’t stop, not until he was satisfied. Despite the growing pain, Will was left fascinated; in awe, of this creature who, like predatory animals, were born with fangs and canines—for the purpose of mauling and taking down prey. Hannibal too, it seemed, was created like those animals—he was merely following his own nature.

Will lifted his other hand and caressed the back of Hannibal’s head, as if in encouragement. “Harder,” he breathed, frankly afraid that his skin might rip at any moment.

Hannibal applied more pressure, until Will felt the first blast of pain hit his skin. He endured it, savoured the intensity of it. He wanted Hannibal to let go; to tear his skin away altogether and spit it out. He wanted to see Hannibal in all his glory, in all his beauty.

Will maintained a steady breath and watched in a quiet frenzy as Hannibal drew back and observed his work. Slowly, blood was collecting in droplets at the puncture marks, and Hannibal was watching them grow to a point where they were in danger of dripping. Just then, he leaned down and ran his tongue against the blood.

Will was sure that he had witnessed something profound and beyond himself, when Hannibal was finally satisfied and withdrew. He gave the wound a final suck, and then turned to look back at Will—his mouth dyed a sickly red. Will ran his eyes over them, wanting his adoration to be obvious to Hannibal. He had never seen or met someone so utterly insane—Will couldn’t deny himself any longer. He leaned forward and kissed Hannibal on his rouged lips, ferocious with hunger himself.

Chapter End Notes

Idk what came over me.

# Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will woke up to the sounds of unfamiliar footsteps. For a second, he entertained the idea that Hannibal had different shoes on, a pair that were new or something. But the stride was different—and hurried.

Will propped himself up on his elbows and waited for the door to slide open, for Hannibal to ease his worries. When the door did finally open, Will drew back in shock at seeing a gun pointed at him—and behind that gun—none other than Beverly Katz, her face contorted into an expression of fear and worry. She was breathing fast as if she had been running. “Will!”

Will gaped back at her—a knot of anxiety was building up in his stomach. He covered his naked chest with the sheets when Beverly’s eyes dropped to examine him.

“What are you doing here?” Will whispered. “Where’s Hannibal?”

Beverly gave him an unsure look but lowered her gun. “God—you’ve no idea how much I’ve been trying to come find you,” she said. “Why does Hannibal not let you get out of the house?”

“Have you been spying on us?” Will asked, wrapping the sheets around himself and standing up.

“God—what does he do to you?” Beverly asked, peering at Will’s neck, where wounds from Hannibal’s bites were healing.

“What did you do to Hannibal?” Will asked—and even as he said it, the possibility of Hannibal’s death seemed impossible. But logically thinking, even Hannibal could succumb to death if he were shot in the right place. Nausea started creeping up in his stomach.

“Never mind that right now. Let’s get you out of here first,” she said, returning her gun to her hip and extending a hand.

“Get out of my way,” Will snapped, urgently wanting to know if Hannibal was alright.

“Will, come on. I’ve been trying to find out what happened to you. It’s like you disappeared!” Beverly reasoned, her voice laced with an urgency that Will had never heard before. Beverly was always sure of herself: she never panicked. “He’s not good for you.”

“You know nothing about him,” Will said, trying to push her away. “Beverly—if you haven’t shot him yet, he’s gonna kill you, you know,”

“He’s brainwashed you, don’t you see?” She took hold of Will’s wrist and tried to drag him out of the room.

“I said I’m not going with you,”

And then, Will froze as he saw Hannibal appear behind Beverly, silent in his socked feet. His temple was bleeding, as if Beverly had had the strength to knock him out unconscious.

Will felt an overwhelming sense of relief at seeing Hannibal alive—and this must have shown on his face because Beverly’s face changed too. But it was already too late for her: Hannibal slipped out the gun from her holster just as she was about to turn around—and so fast that Will didn’t even see it coming, smacked the butt of the gun hard against her temple, after which Beverly’s unconscious body folded onto the floor. Hannibal stooped down and secured her wrists behind her back, handcuffing them and then, he finally looked up to Will. “Are you hurt?”

Will shook his head—frozen in place, out of shock. And then suddenly he kneeled down to face Hannibal, lifting his hand to Hannibal’s face. “Hannibal—” he said. “I was worried sick.”

Hannibal took his hand away and kissed it. “We have to move her to the basement,”

“I’ll help you,” Will answered. “Let me just put on something first.”

Hannibal nodded. He snaked his hand down to Beverly’s neck to check her pulse.

“What are we gonna do?” Will asked, pulling on a sweater.

“First we have to find out if we’re under investigation,” Hannibal said. “Though we will be soon enough when someone notices her absence.”

“I don’t think she’d come here alone if someone—Jack, was supporting her claims.” Will said. Finally dressed, his kneeled down and took Beverly’s legs. “Come on. Take her shoulders.”

*

Downstairs, hands and feet bound and propped up in a chair, Beverly came around when Hannibal splashed cold water on her face. She kicked, but didn’t scream—she knew that she was in a basement, and that the basement was sound-proof. Will felt his empathy kick in as he watched her struggle—and then give up. Beverly had always proven herself to be stronger and surer than anyone he had known. Now, seeing her so helpless was like witnessing something impossible. He pulled his eyes away and centred them on Hannibal to gain back his own confidence—lest he fall into feeling bad for Beverly.

As soon as she stopped trying to wring out of the ropes, Will posed her a question: “Who else knows you’re here?”

Beverly sighed, loud enough to annoy Will. If she was deciding to be uncooperative, then things were surely going to get messy. He didn’t want that for Beverly—even though she had tried to separate him from Hannibal. He tried again: “Why did you come here?”

“Because I’ve been wondering where you disappeared to,” Beverly said, bitterly. “No one has seen you since your visit to the hospital. I got suspicious.” She darted a look to Hannibal.

Will huffed out a laughter. So they weren’t under investigation. “Have you told Jack?”

Beverly paused, contemplative—as if her answer would produce a different outcome for her future. Finally, she gave in. “He told me to mind my own business.” She replied. “So I did my own research.”

Will waited; waited for some uneasy truth to surface. He looked to Hannibal and then back at Beverly.

Beverly shifted her attention to Hannibal. “Where did Dr. Du Maurier disappear to, Hannibal?” she said, whispering almost. “Did you kill her?”

Hannibal looked down at her sternly, as if she was intruding on private matters.

Beverly turned to Will. “Will—he’s dangerous,”

That was hardly news to Will. He stifled the insane urge to burst out in laughter.

Beverly seemed to notice this. “You—you killed Freddie Lounds too! Both of you did it,”

Will paused briefly—he had expected to react differently to being accused—rightly—of being a murderer. The fact that he was more or less calm came to him as a surprise—maybe even a pleasant surprise.

Will turned to Hannibal, as if to ask: when do we kill her?

“Will, please—” Beverly whispered, her voice hoarse. She was clearly hoping to turn Will against Hannibal. It was the only chance she had of getting out of here alive.

Will nodded to Hannibal, who had Beverly’s gun in his grip. He cocked the gun, his eyes fierce. “Fortunate for you, Ms. Katz—we will spare you a quick death,” Hannibal said. “Time is of the essence."

Hannibal reached out for Will to come closer. Will understood, and came to stand before Hannibal, his back to him. He lifted his hand and took the solid gun in his hands, as Hannibal let go of it and placed both his hands on Will’s shoulders.

“Will—don’t you see that he’s manipulating you?” Beverly tried, one last time.

“He’s the only one in the world who understands me,” Will said, unbelieving of the words coming out of his mouth. “Why would you take that away from me?”

“Will—”

And just like that, in a blinding flash, Will pulled the trigger. Beverly’s body jerked backwards sharply and then slumped, blood oozing out of the bullet hole in the centre of her

forehead. It almost felt like a waste, to give Beverly such a simple death—she, who was so meticulous and perceptive.

It was a moment before Will could compose himself and lower the gun. When Hannibal's hand came to rest on the nape of his neck, Will was pulled back into reality. He turned around, and let himself be held. The embrace lasted long, until Will heard a muffled murmur in his ear: "Thank you, Will."

"For what?" Will asked, pulling away to look Hannibal in the eyes.

"For choosing me," Hannibal said, brushing a thumb along Will's jaw.

Will smiled, a little sad. "I don't want anyone to get in between us," he said. "I don't know what I'd do without you."

Hannibal's eyes were shining with tears. He wasn't smiling anymore.

Will pressed on: "I don't ever want to be separated from you."

A tear slipped from Hannibal's eye. Will leaned in and kissed him, as if to keep himself from crying too.

"We must be briefly separated for what's to come for us," Hannibal said, when they parted.

Will nodded. He knew what was coming.

"We have to leave Baltimore behind and lead a new life." Hannibal said. "And for that, traveling alone would be best. Do you think that you can do that?"

Will thought about being alone in the world—and the uncertainty of handling things on his own when Hannibal had done everything for him for the past year. But it would also be an exercise in proving himself capable of such things.

"Do you trust me to not run away, as you used to do?" Will asked, boldly.

"I am the only one in the world to understand you," Hannibal said. "Why would you run away from me?"

Will couldn't help but grin widely. "Where are we gonna go?" Will asked.

Hannibal sighed as Will wiped away the tears from his face. "I always wanted to show you Florence, Will." he answered.

The idea intrigued Will. He'd never thought that he'd get to visit Europe, ever.

"But first, some place less on the FBI's radar."

"Some place warm?" Will asked, hopeful.

Hannibal nodded. "Yes. Cuba, I think."

Will smiled. It sounded like a terrific idea.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading. I felt like I was dragging this story too long so I've decided to end it. Nevertheless, it has been a long journey and a good exercise in writing—and testing out what I wanted with both Hannibal and Will's characters. When I started this fic, I had a more vicious Hannibal in mind...but alas romance always wins.

Once again, thank you all for your support and time :)

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!